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THE PARSON DETECTIVE; or, Little Shocky, the Ranger of Raven-Roost.

BY OLL COOMES.

AUTHOR OF "VAGABOND JOE," "THE DUMB SPY," "ANTELOPE ABE," "KEEN-KNIFE," "PROSPECT PETE," ETC.,



"DEVILS, YOU SHALL NOT POLLUTE MY CHILD'S BODY EVEN WITH YOUR VILE TOUCH! DEATH WILL CLAIM HER BEFORE YOU SHALL!"

The Parson Detective;
OR,
LITTLE SHOCKY,
THE RANGER OF RAVEN-ROOST.

BY OLL COOMES,
AUTHOR OF "DASHING DICK," "TIGER TOM,"
"THE BOY HERCULES," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

REV. PTOLEMY FRODD MAKES AN APPOINTMENT.
THE Missouri river rolled seaward under a summer sky.

There was no moon and a blue mist rising along the stream overspread the heavens, blotting out the stars and wrapping wood, water and plain in one silent, solemn darkness.

A number of lights twinkling through the gloom shone from the cabin of River View on the left bank of the "Big Muddy."

River View was, at the time of which I write, the only village that broke the monotonous desolation of all that territory lying between the mouth of the Keya Paha and Sioux rivers. Brave and adventurous spirits were they who, with their families had dared to settle there in the very face of the dangers from Indian and outlaw.

During the year of 18—, a detachment of Government troops had wintered there. At that time there was no one but an old hunter and trapper within miles of the place. When the soldiers went away they left a line of barracks and three good cabins tenantless, and these were at once taken possession of by a party of hunters and trappers, some of whom had families. Thus a nucleus was formed around which other men with their families began to gather, and in the course of time, River View—now known by another name—bloomed into a frontier village, and, although small, it soon possessed all the characteristics of an old river town.

The Indian, the hunter and trapper, the soldier, the horse-thief and outlaw, the prairie ranger, and the gambler, all contributed to the prosperity, the misery or outlawry, as the case might be, of the place. Judge Lynch's work soon became greatly needed, but that dispenser of border justice seemed slow to take hold at River View. It was a good place for Christian missionary work, and two or three missionaries had attempted to establish a church there, but for the want of physical, as well as moral, courage, their efforts had ended in ignominious failure; and the law-abiding, God-fearing part of the settlement began to fear for the future of the village. In the course of time, however, there came another preacher along answering to the name of Ptolemy Frodd which was at once distorted, by the unsaintly, into Reverend Ptolemy Fraud, the Old Psalm-Singer of the Missouri.

On the night our story opens some twenty men—the roughest characters of the place—were assembled at "The Pine Cone" saloon, a notorious whisky-shop and gambling-house. Some of them were playing cards, some were throwing dice, and some smoking and discussing the subject of their next ministerial grand bounce, Reverend Ptolemy Frodd.

The new preacher had, at the time, only been in the town a day or two. But few of the rouges had seen him yet, and not one of them knew when and where he was to preach his first sermon. In view of the ignorance of these important facts, the bully of the place, who was known as "Rocky," was appointed a committee of one to wait on the preacher and ascertain the time and place of his first appointment. But scarcely had this honor been conferred upon the "mill" when the door of the saloon swung open and a stranger entered.

"That's the Psalm-Singer, now!" exclaimed Rocky in surprise. "It are the Reverint Tolemy Fraud or I'm a bu'sted cabbage-head!"

In general appearance the stranger was rather striking. He was a man of perhaps fifty years of age, and fully six feet in height; but he was slender and angular with long ungainly arms and legs, with hands and feet evidently several sizes too large for the man. The lower part of his long bony face was covered with faded brown whiskers, the upper lip being shaven revealing a mouth of enormous size. His nose was rather long and sharp, his eyes mild and soft as a maiden's. His hair was long and

combed straight down on his temples, giving him a look of meek simplicity. He was dressed in a becoming suit of dark clothes that had evidently been long in service.

Stopping near the door the man politely removed his hat and sat it upon a table. Then, as he stood wringing his fingers, he glanced meekly over the assembled crowd that was half-hidden in a fog of tobacco-smoke, and then in answer to Rocky's remarks on his entering, he said in a mild, yet distinct voice:

"Yes, gentlemen, my name is Frodd—Reverend Ptolemy Frodd. I have come to River View to look after its spiritual welfare."

"Good! good! hear! hear!" shouted the rouges, all quiver with emotion.

"And in passing here," continued the preacher. "I saw there were several of you together, so I just dropped in to say—"

"Hold on thar, a minute, preacher!" interrupted Rocky with a flourish of the hand, as he strode to the bar and taking up a bottle of liquor started toward Frodd, "your voice sounds husky, and you want to take a swaller o' this corn-cologne to cut the mud outen your throat, for I knows you've been drinkin' Missouri river water."

"Thank you, sir, I never drink anything but water," replied the old divine, mildly and politely.

"You'll have to drink corn-essence if ye stay here, Psalm-Singer," declared Rocky; "the climate requires it, so jist you throw aside yer temperance scruples and take a horn and see how much smoother yer can talk."

"Sir, I tell you I never drink liquor!" reiterated the preacher in a firm tone which gave the bully to understand that he meant what he said.

But "Rocky" had gone so far that he could not recede without virtually acknowledging "first blood" in favor of the meek-faced "Psalm-Singer," and so turning to a friend he said:

"Come up here, Mait Hohn, and we'll see if this 'ere old meekly Moses don't take a social nip with us."

Matt Hohn, a heavy set, muscular fellow who was known as Rocky's "right-bower," at once responded to the call of his friend, and swaggered forward with a smile upon his coarse face.

In an instant the crowd was on tip-toe of excitement—eager for what promised some lively sport.

But it was different from what they had expected, for scarcely had Rocky come within reach of Frodd when the latter's long arm shot out and a huge, mallet-like fist was driven into the bully's face with such force as to knock him half senseless on the floor; and, at the same instant almost, he dealt Hohn a left-hander on the side of the head that sent that smiling individual reeling clear across the room.

A yell of surprise, mingled with mutterings of revenge, burst from the lips of the astonished spectators.

Smarting with pain and furious with rage the two rouges regained their feet, and with bitter curses turned toward the preacher.

"Hold on there! hold on!" cried the redoubtable divine, with a revolver in each hand covering the bullies, "the first man that comes near me again will be made the subject for a funeral sermon! Do you hear?"

They did. The terrified rouges started back. The presence of those deadly weapons backed by that towering form and those once meek blue eyes now burning with a fierce light, awed them into motionless silence.

A dead hush fell on the crowd. The fall of a pin could have been heard on the floor. In the stillness a card fluttered from the sleeve of Glyndon, the gambler, and fell with a "fleck" on the floor. The "drip," "drip" of whisky from the faulty spigot of a whisky-barrel behind the bar could be distinctly heard; but no one moved. Reverend Ptolemy Frodd was master of the situation.

Presently he said in a slow, firm and deliberate tone, with his revolvers still drawn:

"Gentlemen, I have come to River View to stay! And, as I was going to say, next Lord's Day, at eleven o'clock, I'll preach in the old barracks, and I want every sinner of you to come out and hear me. Don't forget, eleven o'clock next Sunday at the old barracks, no preventing Providence."

With this the old preacher placed his revolvers in his pockets, took up his hat, with his wonted meekness bade the crowd good-evening, and quietly retired from the Pine Cone.

As the door closed on his tall form, the rouges drew a long breath of relief, and then a subdued

murmur of voices filled the room. The bartender looked after the leaking spigot, Glyndon picked up his card, and Rocky and his "bower" retired for repairs.

CHAPTER II.

"SHOCKY," THE BOY-TRAPPER.

"HALT! Roger Millbank!" and the command was accompanied by the click of revolvers and the sound of footsteps.

The young ranger drew rein, and his hand dropped to his belt as three men issued from the bushes before him with their revolvers covering his breast.

"Don't you dare attempt to draw a pistol," one of the masked villains said, "or you are a dead man! Dismount and surrender, and be quick about it!"

Roger Millbank was not a coward. He had stood face to face with death more than once, and as he now sat upon his horse looking into the revolvers of men whom he knew were outlaws he was unmoved and undaunted. He saw that the foe had him within their power, and yet he had the presence of mind not to precipitate his danger by an attempt to checkmate the enemy.

Roger Millbank was a dashing young ranger of two-and-twenty, known throughout Nebraska and Dakota, and was feared by foes as he was admired by friends. He was a skillful scout, a fine horseman and a remarkable shot with rifle and revolver; and besides these accomplishments of the border ranger and scout, which were the envy of every young man on the prairie who knew him, Roger seemed especially favored by the kindness of Fate in that he was the accepted lover of the fairest of all fair maidens, Ethel Robertson, the niece of Samuel Robertson of River View. He was on his way to the village when met by the outlaws, and when accosted, was riding southward through the timber bordering the Vermillion river some five miles from the Missouri.

Young Millbank had been a source of constant annoyance to the Missouri outlaws and horse-thieves, and he was aware of the fact that a price had been set on his head; and when confronted by the three masked villains he knew that his capture had been carefully planned and executed: though, to gain a moment's respite, he demanded:

"Gentlemen, what does this mean?"

"Ha! I would ask such a question, Roger Millbank!" replied one of the trio, with a sneer. "Did you ever explain to your victims the whys and wherefores of your murderous treatment of them? However, the meaning of this is we have the drop on you and you'll oblige us amazingly by dismounting from your horse without any further words."

As he spoke, the man advanced slowly toward the young stranger, evidently with the intention of seizing his horse by the bits, but divining his purpose a thought flashed through the quick mind of the ranger and digging his roweled heels into his horse's sides, the animal, a quick, fiery creature, lunged forward against the outlaw, knocking him down and trampling him under foot, as it dashed on straight toward the others. Roger threw himself forward on his animal's neck to avert the bullets now whistling over him, but at the same moment his horse leaped wildly into the air and fell dead—shot through the brain. Millbank was thrown violently to the ground and was half stunned by the fall.

Before he could regain his feet he was seized and disarmed; then with a lariat taken from the saddle on the dead horse, he was securely bound hand and foot.

The young ranger's capture, however, had not been made without the cost of life, for the outlaw ridden down lay lifeless, his breast crushed by the horse's feet. This loss rendered the fury of the two captors all the more bitter, and once they were on the point of shooting the young ranger; but a thought seemed to have occurred to their excited minds and putting up their revolvers they cut the lariat in two, tied one end around the youth's neck then dragged him to a tree where there was a convenient limb.

By this time it was getting dark and while one of the men guarded the prisoner the other gathered some dry twigs and limbs and started a fire which soon lit up the surroundings with a ruddy glow.

In the light the outlaws saw that Roger Millbank's face was a little pale, yet a look of unutterable defiance blazed in his eyes. He asked not for mercy, and gave them to understand that he was ready to die as he had lived.

"Now, then," said one of the villains, "you can see what your fate is to be, Roger Millbank.

There is, however, one thing we want to know of you, and we will promise you, in view of the fact, that your fate will depend entirely upon the information you are able to give us. Mind, we know that you have a knowledge of what we seek, and you will also bear in mind that we know enough of the matter to tell whether you give us the truth or not. In fact, all we want of you is a single connecting link."

"Then you will never receive that from my lips," replied the prisoner, defiantly.

"There is a way of compelling you to speak," assured one of the villains. "Here, Rathburn, let's put on the screws."

So saying, they threw the end of the rope over a limb above the young man's head, and catching hold of it, drew down upon it until Roger felt the encircling noose tightening on his throat.

"Now," said one of the outlaws, "we will give you one more chance—what say you, Roger Millbank?"

"I will die rather than save my life by a compromise with villains," was the unequivocal response.

"Then pull down, Rathburn, pull down—"

"Hold on there! hold up there! hold there!" were the three several commands that burst from three different points in the surrounding gloom.

The outlaws started with fear and terror. They quickly let go of the rope and grasped their revolvers, believing it was a case of life and death with them. They glanced quickly around them, but saw no one; to their ears, however, again came the stern command:

"Hold up your hands there, you fellows of the masks, or we'll riddle you full o' holes." The demand came from the right.

"Up with 'em, quick!" came another command from the left.

"Yes, up with 'em, for you've no chance," said a third voice before them, and at the same instant they caught sight of a human eye blazing along the barrel of a rifle that was leveled toward them from a clump of bushes.

The two villains fairly staggered under the terrible shock they had so suddenly sustained. That they were surrounded they had not a doubt, and being caught, too, in an act that would condemn them to death, their chances for life were as doubtful as Millbank's had been a few moments previous. One of them, however, quickly whispered something to the other, then both threw up their hands. But in the mean time they kept their eyes on the rifle before them, and the instant they saw it lowered they whirled and dashed away into the woods, making good their escape from the single bullet that whistled into the darkness after them.

Then, before Roger Millbank was hardly aware of what had transpired, a figure stood before him with a knife in one hand and a rifle in the other. It was the figure of a boy of seventeen, clad in buckskin garments. His round, smooth face was flushed with excitement, and his big blue eyes flashed with emotion. His head was bare and covered with a great shock of long frowsy hair that stood out like the quills of a porcupine, giving him an odd, and, to say the least, comical appearance.

"Shucky, the Boy Trapper!" burst from Millbank's lips, as the boy severed his bonds; "by heavens! I'm glad to see you, lad!"

"I should speculate you war, Rog'r," replied the boy; "but come, git away from this light afore the foe rally."

The boy turned and led the way into the darkness of the woods, closely followed by Roger. Not a word was spoken until they had gone half a mile, when Shucky stopped and said:

"Thar, I guess this'll let us out, Rog'r."

"Yes, yes; but it seems more like a dream, Shucky," replied the ranger. "I can't hardly realize that I am safe. I don't know what to say to you."

"Tell me how you felt 'bout the time them critters begun to pull down on that rope," and the lad burst into a peal of boyish laughter.

"Not now, my little hero; I want to go myself set right first—convince myself I'm not in another world."

"Pshaw, Rog'r! You could easy tell by the smell o' brimstone if you'd gone to another world!"

"Shucky, you little rascal, give me your hand. I want to thank you for getting me out of the worst scrape I was ever in."

"Didn't I play that nice onto them neck-tie men, Rog'r! Didn't they reel off into the dark as tho' Satan war after 'em?"

"You wasn't alone, Shucky?"

"Bet your sweet soul I was!"

"What do you mean to tell me you had no assistance in rescuing me? Why, I heard three or four different voices call out from different points to those outlaws to hold up their hands."

"I can't help it, Rog'r; every one o' them commands come out of this flap-doodle of mine. Why, didn't you know, Rog'r, that I can sling my mouth around like an ole shoe? Didn't you know I'd a double-gear'd, back-action voice that I can chuck away into any hole jist like nothin'?"

"Well, I believe, since you spoke, that I did hear once that you were a kind of ventriloquist, but it seems impossible that one could use his voice like you—"

"Here they are! here they are!" suddenly broke in a voice behind them, and seizing Shucky by the arm, Millbank cried:

"The outlaws are upon us! Run, Shucky!"

Shucky burst into a peal of laughter.

"That war jist a specimen o' my mouth-work, Rog'r," he said.

"Well, that beats me all out of time! Shucky, with that wonderful gift of yours, you should not be here in this heathen land. It would be a fortune to you in the East," declared Millbank.

"That's what my ole pard, Jack Snyder, says, Rog'r," replied the lad, "but, I'll swaney, I won't give up the prairies, the woods and the rivers and all their kersloshin' ole fun. I were cut out for a double-breasted prairie vagabone, and I don't want to be spilt in makin'. But say, Rog'r, won't you go down to the 'Raven's Roost,' and stop over night 'ith me! I'm alone now."

"My dear Shucky, I'd like to go and stay a week with you, but I cannot. I have got to be at River View by to-morrow night, and as I am out of a horse now, it will be all I can do to make it on foot, traveling night and day."

"Well, I'm sorry you can't roost with me, Rog'r; but if you can't now, mebby you can some other time."

"Yes, I will, Shucky, and that before long, too. I owe you a debt of gratitude I will pay some time or other. But, my lad, you must be very careful; if them outlaws find you out, your life will pay the penalty of your daring adventuro of to-night."

"Let 'em sail in," defied the boy; "I could 'a' killed 'em both to-night if I'd wanted to, but I don't want to kill anybody—not even an Ingin. But if I have to, I'll not fool 'bout it."

Thus they conversed as they moved slowly down the river.

Finally they came to where Shucky's road diverged to the right.

Bidding the youth adieu, Roger resumed the journey the outlaws had interrupted.

Shucky turned and glided rapidly away through the lonely wood. He soon came to the foot of a high perpendicular cliff, and, dropping himself on his knees, slaked his thirst from a cool spring that bubbled from under the rocks. Then, slinging his gun at his back by means of a strap, he caught hold of a rope that hung, quite concealed by a natural groove in the rock, against the face of the cliff and began to climb, stepping from one projection to another and steadyng himself with the rope. With wonderful rapidity he glided up the cliff, but practice had made him expert in climbing that rudely improvised stairway.

Up some thirty feet he landed on a ledge or table-rock shaped like a half-moon. It was ten feet wide in the middle. At the back of this the cliff continued on up fifty feet higher, ending in a projection that made approach from above impossible. In this cliff, opening upon the crescent-shaped table-rock, was a spacious hole or cavern in which Shucky, the Boy Trapper, was making his home temporarily, or until his friend, old Jack Snyder, returned from Omaha.

Putting away his rifle and revolvers, Shucky threw himself upon a robe spread upon the rock outside the door of the cavern. Here had he lain an hour before when the report of the outlaw's pistols attracted his attention and led him to the rescue of Millbank.

While the place was a secure one, it was dreadful lonely for the jolly-hearted, fun-loving Shucky. The trapping season had not yet begun, and so the youth had nothing to do but cook his own meals and while away the hot summer days in dull inactivity. His adventures that night were the first of any consequence that he had met with during the summer. Of late, however, he had the promise of all the excitement desired. It was rumored that the Indians had broken out in open warfare in the Hills and along the Niobrara, and that it was only a question of time when the scene of bloodshed would extend eastward to

the Missouri River in Dakota. In fact, roving bands of Sioux had already been reported seen on the Dakota River, and this was bringing danger pretty close to the "Raven's Roost."

As Shucky lay upon his back looking up at the blinking stars, and thinking over what Roger had told him of his ventriloquial powers, he was suddenly startled by what appeared to be the sound of voices.

Rising to a sitting posture he listened and found he was not mistaken—that a number of persons were halted at the foot of the rock; and, what made the discovery all the more startling to him, was the fact of their being Indian voices, and that they were hostiles he had not a single doubt. But what were they doing there? Had they discovered his retreat and the way of reaching it? Were they about to climb the cliff?

Crawling to the edge of the cliff he silently drew up the rope hanging against the rock and thus secured the Roost against invasion.

A few moments later he discovered that the Indians had halted for the night and lighted a fire, and a feeling of uneasiness filled his breast through fear that the lynx-eyed savages would yet find him out and give him trouble. This they could easily do in the daytime by climbing into the trees opposite the Roost; but the boy consoled himself with the reflection that while they were climbing he could be shooting.

As soon as the light of their fire had reached up into the gloom before him, Shucky crawled to the edge of the cliff and peeped over at the crowd. The fire had been built close against the base of the rock, and although the leafy branches of a cottonwood tree partially obstructed his view he was enabled to see seven Indians, all of whom were hideous in war-paint. Nor were they all that he saw; to a tree some thirty feet away, yet within the radius of light, was tied a captive—an old man at the sight of whose face Shucky almost uttered a cry of surprise.

The captive was an old Frenchman named Max La Fleur, though better known as Old Max, the Tanner; and as soon as Shucky recognized him he quickly searched the Indian bivouac for other faces, for, never had he seen Old Max before without his daughter Aimee, a sunny-faced, bright-eyed little girl of sixteen summers, at his side. The boy even searched the girdles of the red-skins to make sure no scalp hung there, for a terrible fear had now seized upon his mind—a fear that the old tanner's daughter had been slain, for to this wild, little trapper-boy, Aimee La Fleur was more than all else on earth. But he could see nothing about the camp by which he could decide, one way or the other, as to the fate of the maiden; and so he composed his feelings and turned his attention to the old man. How he could proceed to rescue him, he could not, for the life of him conceive. The odds were against him seven to one. Were he upon the ground he might, with the aid of his wonderful gift of voice, accomplish the tanner's release as he had Roger's.

The savages seemed totally ignorant of the boy's presence, for, as yet, they had discovered nothing to arouse their suspicions, or curiosity, and feeling that they were secure, for the time being, with their captive, they seated themselves around their fire and entered into conversation.

Presently one of them produced a queer-looking, long-stemmed pipe upon the bowl of which was carved the face of a man. It was evident from the curiosity manifested over this pipe that it was something new to them—doubtless the property of the captive.

Filling the pipe and lighting it the savage took a few whiffs, then advanced to where the captive stood and deliberately puffed cloud after cloud of smoke into the old man's face, almost strangling him.

This treatment of the captive seemed to afford the savages great amusement, and not until the smoker's own mouth burned with the hot smoke did he desist and return to his friends. Seating himself in the circle around the fire he passed the pipe to a comrade, and after he had taken a few puffs passed it on to the next. In this way all were passing the moments in the light of savage enjoyment when something was seen to drop into the fire from overhead.

Involuntarily every savage leaned forward and pressed down at the mysterious object, but only for an instant, for, suddenly, there was a puff, a dull, heavy report, and a flash that seemed the very flame of hell bursting from the earth. Fire, savages, dirt and stone were hurled in one confused mass in every direction. The ground shook as with the jar of an earthquake. The trees hard by swayed violently.

Leaves and twigs were stripped from the boughs and blown upward into the great mountain of sulphurous smoke that filled the surrounding and blotted out the stars of heaven.

Then darkness, deep and awful, fell upon the Indian bivouac and over the Raven's Roost, and the dread silence that followed was broken only by a long-drawn moan of human agony—the agony of death.

CHAPTER III.

AIMEE LA FLEUR.

"OH, why does my dear father not come?"

The speaker was a young girl of sixteen, the daughter of Old Max, the Tanner. A look of intense anxiety was upon her pretty face, and her blue eyes swam in a mist of tears as she watched the river for the coming of her sire.

The cabin of La Fleur stood on the side of a bluff overlooking the Missouri river—some fifteen miles from River View. It was a double-log structure, with a neat front yard blooming with flowers of every hue. For three years had the Frenchman lived there, and in all that time no known danger had threatened him. He had, with a remarkable degree of policy, maintained a strict neutrality with the Indians and whites alike, no difference whether they were friends or foes to the rest of mankind. He believed that such a course would insure him against danger and molestation, and by fair and honest dealings with the Indians, hunters and trappers, hoped to reap a just reward.

Old Max had once been a well-to-do tanner in Omaha, but a fire consumed his tannery one night and left him but little. To add to this pecuniary loss he was soon after compelled to suffer the sore affliction of the death of his wife, and then, with his little daughter Aimee, he embarked on a Government boat for the region of the Upper Missouri. But by the time the boat had reached River View he was ready to stop, and did land at that place; but he had no desire to locate there. He wanted to get away from the baleful influence of liquors—not that he drank himself, but those with whom he expected to trade were addicted to a love of liquor he knew, and he wanted to have nothing to do with drunken Indians. So he went up the river, erected him a cabin, and at once became known as Old Max, the Tanner. He did not pretend to dress and tan all the furs he purchased, for he devoted some time to hunting and trapping himself. He had a ready market for all his goods at Omaha, whither he sent them by Government boat or private parties going from River View for supplies.

Old Max, during the season, was visited almost daily by the Indians and white hunters and trappers of that vicinity, and it required considerable tact to prevent collisions between these ancient foes when they happened to meet each other there. The Indians always went away from his cabin fully satisfied with their trade. He never heard of a single complaint, and in view of these facts he felt that if an Indian war should break out he would have nothing to fear from the red-skins. But there were those he did fear, and these were the outlaws and adventurers that roamed up and down the river—many of them calling at his cabin—seeking his hospitality under the guise of honest men. But he betrayed no suspicion, although he kept a close watch upon them, and guarded well the attraction of his cabin, the fair Aimee, who was budding into a beautiful womanhood.

As time passed on, however, there came the news of an Indian outbreak throughout Dakota and northern Nebraska. Old Max was advised to remove to River View, but he declined to do so. He still adhered to the belief that his fair dealing with the Indians was a sufficient safeguard for him; but Aimee did not share that belief with him—that great faith in the cunning red-skin of whom her boy-lover, Shocky, had told her so much.

And thus matters stood at the time we introduce her to the reader.

Her father had gone away that morning, and evening was now approaching, and he was nowhere in sight. Naturally enough, she became uneasy, for it was something unusual for him to remain away so late. And when the sun finally went down, and the shadows of night began to gather fast, and her father came not, the poor girl's heart became sorely distressed. She paced the floor of the cabin wringing her hands and sobbing. Ever and anon she would go to the door and look out into the night and listen with her hand upon her heart. But nothing could she see, nothing could she hear save the broad white river flowing on at the foot of the bluff.

Finally she went out into the yard and paced uneasily to and fro in the cool night breeze. Here she walked many long hours away, but her father came not.

At length the moon came up, casting a weird, mellow light over woodland, river and plain; but her light brought no ray of hope to the breast of the poor girl, and finally overcome with despondency, she sunk down upon the doorstep. A moment later she caught a faint, far-away sound like the call of a human voice.

In an instant Aimee was upon her feet listening intently.

The howl of a wolf came to her ears. That faint ray of hope faded from her face, and she bit her lip to keep back an outburst of grief. Still, there might be more in that wolf's howl, she thought, than she had at first supposed, and so she continued listening. In this she was right, for she could soon hear a dozen or more wolfish voices all gathering at a point, as it seemed, a mile or two up the river. And once she was sure she heard a human voice mingled with those of the beasts, and when she heard it repeated she waited for no more, but turning sped down the bluff to the river's edge, where, in a little cove, lay a small bark canoe.

In a few moments the girl was in the craft gliding up the river.

She was quite skillful in handling the paddle, and her bark being a mere shell—Indian handiwork purchased of the Sioux by Aimee herself—she skimmed rapidly along, flashing in and out of the shadows and moonlight that fell upon the winding river like a spectral boatman. Her head was bare, and her long yellow hair, tossed back from her fair face, floated on the breeze at her back, while her little form swayed to and fro with each stroke of the paddle.

Presently she stopped to listen. The sound of those wolfish voices was not far off and dipping her paddle she sped on. Plainly could she now hear the beasts barking, howling, and snarling as if impatient to begin a nocturnal feast.

Finally Aimee knew by the sounds that she was opposite the yowling, gibbering beasts, and running her bark to the shore she landed and tied it up. Then taking up a stout stick that lay on the beach she proceeded into the shadowy woods, her heart rising in her throat. As she advanced the timber became more open. There were but few trees before her. Moonlight and shadows checkered the earth, and in and out of these she suddenly saw dark, shaggy forms whisking to and fro like a weaver's shuttles.

And such a wild, infernal din of voices! The blood in Aimee's veins ran cold. She stopped and with starting eyeballs glared at the scene before her. It seemed that a hundred wolves were circling around and around a common center, snapping and snarling and fighting. Ever and anon a beast would utter a sound like a human wail or break into a wild, maniac laugh. And suddenly—above all these bedlam voices—rose a human moan.

A cry burst from Aimee's lips, and lifting her stick she ran in among the beasts, calling out in wild shrieks to her father. The maddened wolves parted on either side of her and fell back with a sudden yelp of surprise and disappointment.

Lying prone upon the earth the maiden discovered the form of a man, but before she had scarcely reached the body—before she could look at the face, the wolves rallied and returned with renewed violence, closing in around her. With her stick she beat them back, but gradually they closed around her—some coming so close as to snap the skirts of her dress. Her feeble blows only maddened them. Their eyes glowed like balls of fire and the fetid odor of their bodies and breath sickened her.

But it was a case of life and death with Aimee La Fleur and her father, whom she believed to be the man lying at her feet. She fought as only one fired with a last desperate hope could fight, but each blow grew feebler, her head was growing dizzy, the earth seemed slipping away when, suddenly, there was a flash—a sharp report rung out above the babel of wolfish voices and was quickly followed by another flash and another report.

Aimee's courage rallied. The horde of wolves, like an ominous cloud, parted and vanished as if by magic, and in the moonlight bursting through, she saw a familiar form and face approaching; and Shocky, the Boy Trapper, stood before her.

The ring of his revolver had frightened the wolves away.

"OH, Shocky! my father is dying or dead!" burst from the girl's lips as the boy stopped before her, speechless with horror—almost doubt-

ing the evidence of his own eyes—doubting the presence of Aimee La Fleur in flesh and spirit until she had spoken.

"Great heavens, Aimee!" he cried, grasping the trembling hand of the girl, "what has gone wrong? Your father dead?"

The two turned and looked down into the bloody face of the prostrate form.

A cry, half joy, half regret, burst from the maiden's lips.

"Aimee, this is not your father," said Shocky; "it is the young ranger, Roger Millbank!"

"Oh, where can father be?" the girl cried, wringing her little hands and looking imploringly into Shocky's face.

"Aimee," the boy said, "I saw your father once to-night and he—"

"You saw father, Shocky? Was he alive?"

"Yes, but he was a prisoner in the hands of seven Indians."

"Oh, heavens! then my worst fears have come true!"

"But I do not think he is a prisoner now, Aimee," the boy continued; "the whole party had camped at the foot of Raven's Roost where I was. They tied their captive to a tree about two rods away and then set down around their fire. I dropped a package of gun powder into their fire. It exploded with a concussion like a magazine. It was ten times worse than expected, and them savages were blown to kingdom come. It puffed up into my face knockin' me almost senseless and fairly blindin' me. It war ten minutes afore I could tell whether I was dead or alive. I heard a groan and called to your father, but there was no answer. It bein' dark as pitch I climbed down from my roost and went to where your father'd been tied, but he was gone. I hunted around and found two wounded Injins and two dead—one of the latter blowed all to smidgeons. As I didn't know what'd become of your father—whether he'd got loose and come home or the survivin' Injuns'd taken him off, I struck for your cabin to see. Hearin' a racket out here I concluded to inquire into it, and that's how I happen to be here. I see now that the Lord sent me, Aimee. But, poor Roger Millbank! I'm afraid he's gone under this time. I rescued him once to-night from two outlaws up on the Vermilion."

"Shocky? Is that your voice I hear, Shocky?" The question came from the lips of the prostrate man.

"Yes, Rog'r, it's me," replied the boy, kneeling beside the ranger, "and, great smidgeons! ar'n't I glad you're still alive! Rog'r, what can I do for you?"

"I don't know, Shocky; I'm pretty badly pounded up."

"Who done it, Rog'r?" asked the boy; "do you know?"

"No; but it was some one who was too cowardly to face me, and crept up behind and struck me down with a club and beat me till I was unconscious. It was some one, too, who had no arms or else did not want to kill me with pistol or knife. I have my opinion who it was now, Shocky, since my mind has become clearer, but, my boy, who were you speaking to just now?"

"Miss Aimee La Fleur."

"Indeed! his—Max La Fleur's pretty child? Good-evening, Aimee!" and the voice of the prostrate man was weak and excited.

"Good-evening, Mr. Millbank," the maiden replied. "Oh, sir, what a struggle I had to keep the wolves from devouring you."

"God bless you, Aimee! you are a brave little girl, and—"

Here Roger broke down. A moment's silence ensued that was broken by Shocky.

"Rog'r, you didn't tell me who it war you thought tried to kill you."

"Shocky," answered Millbank evasively, "could you bring me a sup of water? I am famishing."

"Yes, indeedy, Rog'r," but as he turned away toward the river, he said to himself: "By heavens! I b'lieve he mistrusts Aimee's father, Max La Fleur!"

In a few minutes the boy returned with Roger's pocket-flask full of water, which the ranger drank and at once expressed a feeling of relief.

Aimee proposed that the wounded man be removed to her home. Shocky favored the idea, but Roger was silent, and his silence, to the Boy Trapper, was significant. Aimee tendered her canoe to the ranger.

"Rog'r, what d'ye say?" queried Shocky.

"Shocky, it's just as you say; I am almost helpless."

The Parson Detective.

"Then, if we can git you to the canoe, I'll take you to Mr. La Fleur's cabin, and stay with you till you're able to resume your journey."

"God bless you, Shocky!"

Roger was assisted to his feet, when the heroic little trapper-boy took him on his back and carried him down to the river and laid him in the canoe. Then the boy and the maiden took their seats in the boat and dropped quietly downstream. They moved slowly, for the boat was taxed to its utmost capacity; but in the course of time they arrived at the landing in front of the La Fleur cabin. Roger Millbank, supported between Shocky and Aimee, was conducted up the hillside and into the cabin, where he was placed upon a couch.

Disappointment met Aimee on her arrival home, for she had hoped that her father might be there.

Shocky proceeded to wash the blood from Roger's head and face and dress his wounds. Aimee brought him water and bandages.

While thus engaged, a footstep sounded outside the door, and the next moment a wild, haggard form reeled into the room.

It was Max La Fleur, though Aimee scarcely knew him. His head was bare, and his long, dark hair and full beard tossed and disheveled like that of a madman's. A wild look was in his eyes, and he started back at sight of Shocky, as if with fear.

"Oh, father!" cried Aimee, throwing her arms about his neck, "I have mourned you as dead! but, father, what is the matter? why do you shrink from me?"

"My God, Aimee!" burst from his lips, "I am going mad! I am a murderer! The curse of Cain is upon me! For hours I have been hiding away in the darkness, afraid even to approach my own door. Aimee, I killed Roger Millbank, through mistake in the darkness, believing he was a savage, until—"

"No, no, Mr. La Fleur," interrupted Shocky, "you didn't quite kill him, for there he lays, good as forty-'leven dead men!"

"My God! Roger Millbank here, and alive!" and for the first time since entering his eyes fell upon the prostrate form of the ranger, who, rising upon his elbow, said:

"I know now it was a mistake, Max, though you dealt me some terrible blows. But your daughter Aimee came to my rescue, and, with her assistance and Shocky's, I guess I'll pull through."

Max La Fleur dropped upon his knees, and lifting his face toward heaven, murmured a prayer. When he rose to his feet he seemed transformed into a new being. He was Max La Fleur again—a large, noble-looking old man of sixty, with a commanding figure, and a face pleasant and intellectual.

"Roger," he said, advancing to the ranger's bedside and taking his hand, "I have passed through the tortures of hell since I left you lying, as I believed, dead. Fear took possession of me the instant I discovered my mistake, and I fled wild with horror. But the fact is I was almost crazy when I struck you down, for I had passed through an ordeal just awhile before that completely unnerved me. It was this: Seven of my old Indian customers on the war-path, took me prisoner. After traveling some distance they camped for the night at the foot of a great cliff. I was tied to a tree hard by. A fire was lighted at the foot of the cliff, and while my captors were seated around it, an explosion occurred in their midst that absolutely blew fire and red-skins out of existence, for all I know. I received such a wrench, also, as to break my bonds, and in the sulphurous darkness that hung over all I escaped. But what the cause—"

Here the old tanner was interrupted by an outburst of laughter from Shocky and Aimee. After this the lad explained the cause of the explosion, and his story filled the Frenchman with surprise and wonder.

La Fleur finished dressing Roger's wounds, and after the young ranger had been skillfully bandaged and anointed he began to feel better and his spirit revived. In fact, all parties felt better, for the worst appeared to be over with. But, alas! for human hopes. A pistol outside in the darkness suddenly rung out and Shocky, who was advancing toward the open door, uttered a cry, threw up his hands and staggering backward, sunk with a moan to the floor.

The next instant the lithe figure of a dark-visaged man with his head tied up in a red handkerchief, glided into the room, followed by four savages whose faces were ringed and streaked until they appeared the very demons of hideousness!

CHAPTER IV.

THE WEDDING IN THE GROTTO.

FROM the "Pine Cone" Ptolemy Frodd went direct to his own quarters that were located in the east end of the village in a building known as "The Twin Cabins." Two cabins standing about eight feet apart were covered with one continuous roof, thus covering the open space between. In one of these cabins Reverend Ptolemy resided—boarding with the family living in the other end. His apartment was entered by a door opening under the shed, and he had just reached the space between the buildings when he was met by a cloaked figure that asked:

"Is this Rev. Ptolemy Frodd?"

"It is, sir," and the hand of the old divine mechanically sought the pistol in his bosom.

"Then here is something for you," said the unknown, thrusting a note into his hand; "I hope you'll not delay in reading it and complying with the request therein."

So saying the man turned and hurried away. Frodd's mind at once reverted to the Pine Cone, but a moment's reflection convinced him that the note had nothing to do with his trouble there. The roughs had not had time to act, even though they felt disposed to; so opening the door he entered his room and lighted a lamp. Then opening the note he read:

"REV. PTOLEMY FRODD: Please be at the Fairy Grotto by ten o'clock, sharp, to-night to officiate at a romantic wedding. Secrecy is enjoined for the time being. Do not fail to come under any circumstances, or we shall be sadly disappointed. If you have doubts of our honesty of purpose we will satisfy you when you come to the grotto."

"THE BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM."

"Well, well," mused the old preacher, as a broad smile passed over his face, "Ptolemy Frodd, you're getting right into business all in one night. This is, most assuredly, a romantic wedding, but why is it at the Fairy Grotto? because the grotto is a romantic place? Let me see; there are half a dozen marriageable young ladies in River View and I wonder which one it can be? But the way to find out is to go and see and I believe I'll go. I always had a weakness for romance and—but fie! fie! why speculate?"

Placing the letter in his pocket, he lit a small pocket-lantern and then looked at his watch. It wanted forty minutes of ten o'clock. It was time to start, for the grotto was over a mile away.

Putting out his light and closing the bull's-eye of his lantern, the old preacher left the cabin. With rapid strides he hurried from the village and entered the little valley that led to the grotto. A little stream meandered through the vale and a dense wood grew upon either side. A path led along the stream.

Twenty minutes' walk brought the old divine to the head of the valley whose sides closed abruptly in and where the arcading branches of the trees formed a beautiful avenue at the upper end of which a little cascade fell with a musical roar.

This was the place that the citizens of River View had aptly named Fairy Grotto; and as Ptolemy Frodd entered its silent darkness, a voice called out:

"Who comes there?"

"Rev. Ptolemy Frodd," was the answer.

"Indeed! I had hardly expected you so soon, my dear sir," said the stranger, taking the preacher's hand.

Frodd opened his lantern and raising it let the light shine into the man's face; but a glance convinced him that his face was securely covered with a mask of false whiskers.

"Well, who have I the honor of meeting?" the disappointed preacher asked.

"The 'groom,'" was the evasive reply, given in a pleasant tone.

"And where's the bride?"

"She'll be here soon."

"Well, well, am I to remain in ignorance of whom I have been summoned here to join in wedlock?" asked Frodd.

"Yes, sir, for the present; but I assure you there is nothing wrong about this secret work. It is just a notion of mine and the bride's to keep our marriage a secret for a short time. After the marriage is consummated I will call at your cabin and give you our names that you may make out a certificate for my wife to keep, for I shall start at once for the West."

"Not to-night?"

"Yes, to-night; the Indians are on the war-path and I have been summoned by the Government to my post of duty as scout."

"Ay, my good fellow!" exclaimed old Ptolemy, "you are Roger Millbank, I mistrust,

and I have an idea who the bride is. Roger is the only scout and ranger that I can think of in Government service around here."

"Ah! Here comes my bride," said the masked man, and his voice fell almost to a whisper.

True enough, the lithe figure of a female wearing a long cloak and with her face closely veiled, emerged from the shadows into the light and gliding to the side of the masked man looked up into his face. He spoke to her in an undertone, then she fluttered closer to his side as if afraid of the surrounding shadows and took hold of his arm.

Reverend Frodd saw that he was not to know who either of the parties were, for certain, and he began to feel that it was his duty to discourage such a secret marriage instead of consummating it, and dissuade the thoughtless young folks from what might in time be seriously regretted; for, while the marriage would be unnatural, it would be as binding on the parties in the eyes of Heaven, and as legal as though performed in midday in the presence of all River View.

Neither of the lovers would yield, however, to his counsel, for they claimed they had considered the matter carefully, and so the old divine yielded, and in a slow and measured tone pronounced those few words that made them husband and wife.

As soon as the ceremony had ended, and the preacher had congratulated the strangely-wedded pair, all three left the grotto and started back toward the village, the Rev. Ptolemy taking the lead. In the course of a few minutes they reached the outskirts of the town, when Frodd left the young people to pursue their homeward journey, while he hastened to his own dwelling. But, scarcely had he reached his room and lighted his lamp, when there came a rap on the door, and before he could answer the call the door swung open, and the man he had just married entered, his face still securely masked.

"Excuse me, sir," he said; "my wife reminded me just as we reached the door of her home that we had forgotten the certificate of our marriage. Will you please make out one, Mr. Frodd?"

"Certainly," the preacher quickly responded, for he was anxious to know the names of the contracting parties.

Seating himself at a table, he took from a little chest pen, ink and paper, and wrote out the certificate in blank.

"Now what names shall I fill in?" he asked.

"Oh, never mind them," replied the man; "just sign it, and I can fill in the names."

"No, no!" replied the preacher, a vague suspicion, for the first time, rising in his mind. "I have already done what I now feel was not right in marrying you as I did, and I will never let my signature go out to a blank certificate, for two wrongs do not make a right."

"Very well, then," responded the man, impatiently, and evidently disappointed; "my name is Rufus Humboldt."

"Rufus Humboldt?" repeated the old man, with a look that clearly told that he doubted the man's truthfulness; but after a moment's pause he wrote down the name, saying: "Well, Rufus Humboldt is a stranger to me in name, but I hope we may become better acquainted. Now your wife's maiden name, Mr. Humboldt?"

"Ethel Robertson."

"Well! well!" exclaimed the preacher, as he wrote down the name, "I have met Ethel Robertson, and I must say you have the fairest of all fair women for a wife. But I heard just yesterday that she was the betrothed of Roger Millbank. I declare, you must have made a mistake in giving me your name," and the old fellow burst into a chuckling laugh.

Having dated the instrument and duly signed it as "Minister of the Gospel," he passed it to Humboldt.

"Thank you, sir," replied the latter, glancing over the paper, "but one thing more. You do not know, perhaps, that there were witnesses to our marriage to night?"

"I was not aware of any but high Heaven."

"Ay, but there were—two friends of ours were secreted in the shadows near. Hubert Anson and Heil Macon are their names. Please put them down as witnesses."

"I would rather not without—without the consent of the gentlemen themselves," replied Frodd, growing more and more distrustful of the man before him.

"Then that can be readily obtained," said Humboldt, and advancing to the door gave a low whistle.

In answer to the call two young men, whom Frodd had never seen, entered the room and

politely doffing their hats, accosted the old preacher.

"These," said Humbolt, "are the gentlemen who witnessed the marriage."

"Yes, sir," added one of them, "we were witnesses to the marriage of our friend at the Fairy Grotto."

"Well, verily," exclaimed the divine, writing down the names, "this strikes me as being a very remarkable, and I must say, mysterious wedding. I hope nothing bad'll come of it. But there you have it, Mr. Humbolt, with the names of Hubert Anson and Heil Macon as witnesses."

Humbolt took the certificate and carefully read it over, then folding it up he thrust it down into an inner pocket. Frodd, who was watching him all the time, saw, as he drew his hand from that same pocket, that he held in his fingers a little derringer; and before he had time for a second thought the man pointed the weapon at his head and pressed the trigger. There was a flash, a sharp report, a groan, and Ptolemy Frodd sunk to the floor.

Then Rufus Humbolt blew out the light, and, followed by his two men, hurried out into the darkness.

CHAPTER V.

ADMIRATION OF THE OLD "PSALM-SINGER."

THE departure of Rev. Ptolemy Frodd from the Pine Cone saloon was not, as might naturally be supposed, followed by any noisy demonstrations or violent threats on the part of the assembled crowd. On the contrary the roughs were inclined to regard the matter seriously. They could not shake off in a moment the awe-inspiring influence that the old preacher's presence had left them under.

After Rocky and Matt Hohn had washed the blood from their faces and dressed their wounds, they sat down and began to talk over their "mill" with the "Old Psalm-Singer," as he was termed.

"Thar's no use a-talkin', pard," said Rocky, "that Ole Psalm-Singer's none o' yer low and meekly critters. He may be solid on religion and temperance, but he's chock full o' grit, and he's got a fist and the science and an arm to drive it home like a shot from a Columbiad. I say, Mathew Hohn, how did you feel when he fotted you that left-hander?"

"I thought a behemoth had kicked me," replied Hohn, gravely, "and I know I see'd more stars o' the fust magnitood than ole Astronomy, hisself, ever see'd."

"Well, my friends," observed the handsome young gambler, Dick Ogilvie, who had entered the saloon some time after the encounter with Frodd, "don't all this teach us one thing?"

"Ya-as," put in the proprietor of the Pine Cone, "it learns me one thing, and that is, we've got to squelch that Ole Psalm-Singer before he gits the whip-row over us, or River View's a dead duck. No town can prosper on religion and water."

"Secor," said the gentlemanly-spoken gambler, Ogilvie, whose opinions on most subjects went a long way with those whom he almost daily "fleeced" out of their earnings and stealings, "you and I have been always hail fellows well met—never had a word of difference; but let me say right here that I admire pluck and manhood even in a preacher. A man that's willing to back his religious convictions with his fists, if need be, is a man to be respected as well as feared. Now, Ptolemy Frodd is one among a thousand of his profession. Why, the coolness with which you say he entered this saloon, the firmness with which he refused to drink, the handsome and scientific manner in which he erected a shed over Rocky's eye, and the magnificent and gorgeous style in which his left hand kissed Mathew's cheek—bringing that gentleman to grass, has won my admiration and respect. I only wish I could have been here to have seen his style."

"Shake, pard!" exclaimed Rocky, to the utmost surprise of all; "that's just the way I feel, only a little more so whar the swellin's goin' on over my eye."

"And I foller suit," chimed in Hohn, and then the crowd clapped their hands and roared.

"Lookey here," said Rocky, rising to his feet, "you may think that Old Psalm-Singer's skeered me into this, but ye think wrong if ye do. And listen to me, will ye? Next Sunday I'm goin' to meetin' and—"

Here he was interrupted by a roar of laughter; but after the noise subsided he went on:

"And I'm goin' to respect the teachin's o' my old mother again, and behave myself like a man, for I tell you I do respect that thar Ole

Psalm-Singer. I would like to see every whisky-mug o' you fellars thar, but remember that the first one that undertakes to git up a dog-fight, or the fellers that begins a game o' poker door-in' meetin', or takes a drink o' whisky and passes the bottle to the preacher, or otherwise disturbs the meetin' as hereuntofore, I'll jump right thar and then and lick 'ithin an inch o' his or her life. D'y'e hear me, pard's?"

"Bravo!" shouted the cool and cunning Ogilvie; "that has the true metallic ring, Rocky! Don't you see, boys, that if we pull too strong against religion and Sunday 'bib and tuckers,' there be just grounds for the organization of a vigilant committee, and you know—or some of you, do doubt—that these things lead to necktie-parties. Acquiescence, in a manner, is the best thing for you, gentlemen, since the pilgrims of River View have found a leader."

"Ya-as," growled the barkeeper, who was not in accord with a movement calculated to injure his business, "Ogilvie'll take the Psalm-Singer's side publicly, but I'll bet he'll skin him in a private game of poker before he's preached his second sermon." This was said in a low tone to a friend, who indorsed every word of it by a nod.

And thus the matter was discussed for two long hours, when suddenly the door flew open, and a man entered in great excitement. All recognized him at a glance as Major Robert Brandt, a Government surveyor who was stopping at River View, but who had never been seen in the Pine Cone before.

"Hullo, major," exclaimed Ogilvie, rising to his feet, and advancing toward him, "what's up, anything?"

"A foul murder has been done!" cried the surveyor, excitedly; "Rev. Ptolemy Frodd is lying at the point of death with a bullet-hole through his head!"

A cry of surprise and horror burst from the lips of the roughs. Ogilvie turned pale and with a quick, searching look he turned and ran his eyes over the crowd as if for evidence of guilt that would naturally be stamped upon the face of the assassin were he present.

Rocky rose, too, and as he did so there was a look of stern gravity on his face, and a fierce light in the single eye on duty, since the old preacher had dressed the other in mourning. In a tone firm and emphatic, yet full of emotion, he said:

"Gentlemen, thar's been foul play. Some coward has rung in a cold deck on the Ole Psalm-Singer, and though I, Phelix Bunks, still bear the wounds, smokin' hot, too, given me by that ole pilgrim, I'm ready to help in huntin' down the assassin and hang him on a horn o' the moon!"

"And put me down to help ye, Rocky," shouted Matt Hohn.

"And me, too," put in the gambler, Ogilvie, and his words were repeated by nearly half of the excited crowd.

In a few minutes more the roughs in the Pine Cone had dispersed, and in a short time after Ogilvie, accompanied by Rocky and Hohn, proceeded to the Twin Cabins where Rev. Ptolemy Frodd was said to be dying.

Half the town was already assembled outside the cabin, discussing in excited tones the terrible deed. It was quite dark—so dark that Ogilvie and his friends could distinguish no one by his face. This fact enabled them to hear much that they would not had they been recognized in the crowd. Suspicions of the assembled populace turned toward that hot-bed of iniquity, the Pine Cone, whose frequenters had long before declared no missionary should ever stay long enough in River View to preach his second sermon.

"You see, boys," whispered Ogilvie, "where the suspicion rests, but we can prove our innocence and—"

"Good news! good news!" suddenly shouted a man that came running from the cabin: "the doctor says the old preacher'll live!—that he's only got a bad scalp wound. The old feller's come to his senses now and recognizes us folks; but when still a leetle flichty he started up inquirin' 'bout them *three* fellers, meanin' his assassins."

"We'll find 'em at the Pine Cone!" yelled some one in the crowd.

"Yes, there's where they are!" shouted another, and then a score of voices took up the cry and continued: "The Pine Cone! to the Pine Cone with firebrand and rope!"

The citizens had become, by these few excited words, incited into a howling mob crying for blood and vengeance. A movement was made toward the saloon, but suddenly, above the

noise of the surging crowd a stentorian voice rung out.

It was the voice of Ptolemy Frodd.

"Hold! hold, my friends! listen to me a moment."

The mob stopped and turned their faces toward the speaker who stood under the roof between the cabins. A dead silence reigned.

"My friends," continued the old divine, "do nothing rash. There is a mystery about this night's darkness and crime that I cannot fathom. I do not believe my attempted assassination was done by the Pine Cone people. True, I was there to-night and had a little difficulty with two of them, and yet I do not believe either of them guilty of crime against me. Two of the three assassins I never saw before and the third one was masked and is also unknown to me. My friends, go to your homes and sleep over this, and to-morrow morning we can take some steps toward hunting down the villains. I am glad to say that my skull was hard enough to turn the assassin's bullet; although it knocked me senseless and has marred the symmetry of my face somewhat, it has not damaged the fluency of my tongue, as you see."

An outburst of laughter greeted this grim humor, as the preacher turned and went back to his room, while the crowd dispersed and each one sought his home. Not all, either, for as soon as Frodd and Dr. Wales were alone, the gambler, Ogilvie, Rocky and Hohn were ushered into the presence of the wounded divine. Hohn had a bandage around his jaws, as though the victim of the toothache, and Rocky's left eye was swollen shut, and his face around it black and blue.

"We beg your pardon for this intrusion," said the free and easy Ogilvie, "but we felt it our duty to call and see you, Mr. Frodd, and tender you our services."

"Thank you, sirs," replied the preacher, eying the gambler closely. "Be seated, gentlemen, and let me hear your opinion of this night's work."

"It's all dark as Egyptian gloom to me," declared Ogilvie, as the three sat down around the preacher's table, upon which sat the lamp.

"And it's more'n dark to this left eye o' mine, preacher," asserted Rocky; "but I hold no grudge 'ginst you for all that. A man that's got the sand to back his religion with his fists and revolvers are my style o' Christians, and I'll be da—doomed if I don't calkerlate to stand in with you till he—Hades freezes over."

"And here, too," chimed in "Right Bower."

"We naturally felt a little uneasy arter we heard you war down," continued Rocky. "knowin' as what you'd taken a hand 'ith us at the Pine Cone. We war afraid you'd think we war tryin' to ring in a cold deck on ye."

"No, no, I did not think any such a thing, Rocky," Frodd replied. "I know that my assassins were not at the saloon when I was there, for I took in every face in the room, and would have remembered them. I don't remember of seeing Mr. Ogilvie there, but I know he was not one of the three. I am glad you are all feeling kindly toward me, for I need friends like you men to assist me in hunting down that murderous trio."

"Mr. Psalm-Singer—ahem—I mean Mr. Fraud," stammered Rocky, "if yer want to put us down as friends and helpers, yer can do so. We admit we arn't saints by a da—doomed sight, but it's our desire to play you a square game—excuse me, sur, I mean—"

"I will not be prepared," said Frodd, with a smile at Rocky's confusion, "to take any definite measures before morning. If you three men will call to-morrow morning, I may be able to know exactly what I will do in the premises. Call early to-morrow morning, and I hope you'll find me a little clearer in my mind."

So with this the three men rose, and bidding the preacher and doctor good-night, left the cabin. As soon as the door had closed upon them, Dr. Wales turned to his patient and said:

"Ptolemy, you have won Rocky and Hohn's eternal friendship, but keep an eye on that gambler, Dick Ogilvie! He hadn't much to say, but don't forget that—"

"The shallows murmur while the deeps are dumb," quoted Ptolemy Frodd.

"Exactly, parson, exactly," said Wales; "but seeing I can do nothing more for you to-night, I believe I'll go home."

So saying, he bade the preacher good-night and departed.

Ptolemy closed the door and locked it and made arrangements to retire. It was now past midnight, and he had no idea that he would be visited again that night; but, just as he had re-

moved his coat and taken his revolver from his pocket, there came a quick, gentle knock on the door.

The old man started, and for a moment a look of doubt contracted his brow; but finally he advanced, and, unlocking the door, held his revolver in his hand at his back, and, stepping back to the opposite side of the room, called out:

"Walk in!"

Quickly the door swung open, and a veiled woman glided into the room.

CHAPTER VI.

SOME STARTLING REVELATIONS.

At a glance Ptolemy Frodd saw that his lady visitor was the bride of the Fairy Grotto marriage, and, slipping his revolver into his pocket, he advanced and said:

"My dear young woman, whoever you may be, I am glad to see you at this very moment. Will you please be seated?"

The woman took the proffered chair, and, as she did so, threw back her veil, saying:

"Parson Frodd, I have no longer a desire to keep my identity from you."

A fair and lovely face was revealed to the old man's gaze, but it was pale and wore traces of recent sorrowing. It was that of a girl of perhaps seventeen years. Without betraying any emotion, however, Frodd said:

"Ethel, I found out some time ago who the bride of the Fairy Grotto wedding was from your husband."

"Then you have seen him since we parted?" said Ethel.

"Yes, Ethel, he came right here after escorting you home and asked for a certificate of marriage. In making it out he gave me your name and his. He was also accompanied by two men, who were witnesses to your marriage."

"Witnesses?" cried the pale young girl, excitedly. "I knew nothing of the presence of witnesses there!"

"Well, it seems there were; nor was this all, Mrs. Humbolt."

"Mrs. Humbolt?" cried Ethel. "Why do you call me that?"

"Why, my dear girl, don't you know your husband's name? Don't you know you were married to Rufus Humbolt?"

"Did he give you that name, Mr. Frodd?"

"He did, Ethel."

"Oh, God!" she shrieked, as though her heart had been pierced, "then my worst fears are realized! I am the wife of some villain, and not of him I loved, Roger Millbank. Oh! it cannot be that Roger has betrayed me into some adventurer's power!"

"Then you were to have married Roger?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, well, well," exclaimed Frodd, "there is something seriously—yea, criminally wrong, in this night's mysteries, and I feel that I am greatly to blame. I should have discouraged your secret marriage—refused to be a party to it. But how such a mistake could have been made I cannot conceive, nor can I understand, even now, why you wished to marry as you did, *incognito*."

"Mr. Frodd, I will tell you all," said the wretched girl: "In the first place my uncle and guardian was opposed to my marrying Roger Millbank, but my aunt was not. A few evenings ago Roger and I met at the Fairy Grotto and arranged for a secret wedding before he went away to act as scout for the Government. The reason why we arranged to meet there closely masked and veiled was through fear that you knew of uncle Robertson's dislike of Roger and would refuse to marry us. We had hopes that time would change uncle's feelings toward Roger. I knew, however, that it was not so much dislike of Roger after all as it was his desire that I marry another man, and when I heard him tell aunty that he would compel me to marry his young friend as soon as he arrived I wanted to place a barrier between me and that man by marrying Roger. In the course of a few days I was to call on you and obtain a certificate of our marriage as proof to be given at the proper time. Not a soul that we knew of was about when we made the arrangements for the wedding in every detail. Of course, the fatal mistake lay in meeting there masked. This afforded the man Humbolt an opportunity to deceive me, for, under a mask, no voice would sound natural. This I knew, and that is why I did not detect the voice of a stranger under the mask. Moreover, Mr. Frodd, he wore the very hat that Roger had on at our last meeting, else one just like it, and, under these circumstances, do you wonder at my being deceived?"

"No, no, my child; but what puzzles me now

is how that man Humbolt came to be in Roger's place. Either he overheard your detailed arrangement for your marriage and has made way with Millbank and substituted himself, or else he was a confidential friend of Roger's to whom Roger revealed your secret and was then made way with. If neither of these, then Roger has betrayed you."

"No, that cannot be, Mr. Frodd! Roger is a true and honorable man. He would not deceive me. My suspicion that something was wrong was aroused after we parted with you to-night. My husband hurried me along in rude haste, and with a simple 'good-night' spoken excitedly he left me at the door of my home and walked rapidly away. I stole softly into the house, and, going to my room, I sat down and took a good cry. It almost broke my heart to think Roger would act so cold and cruel, and that, too, when he was leaving me for months, and, perhaps, forever. I took off the ring he had given me at the grotto and looked at it until its brilliant flashings seemed to burn into my very heart. Something impressed me with a feeling of strange doubt, and the conviction began to force itself upon me that I had committed a wrong in marrying as I did, and I became anxious to unburden my secret to you. When I heard you had been killed I could not help thinking your murderer had something in sympathy with my marriage, and I was on the eve of making a clean breast of all my secret to my uncle and aunt when the news came to my ears that you were not dead, but only wounded. I could not rest or sleep until I had told you all this—some invisible power impelled me forward, and bade me tarry not until I had seen you. But during all this time, and notwithstanding the cold, cruel and heartless manner in which my husband treated me, it never occurred to me that he might be any one else but Roger; nor can I see yet how it could be any other."

"If it was Roger Millbank, Ethel, then he is a murderer, for it was he whom you wedded that shot me down and left me for dead after I gave him the certificate."

"Oh, my God!" cried the startled woman, "this cannot be, Mr. Frodd! Roger Millbank is not a murderer!"

"Then Roger is not your husband, Ethel. Merciful Father! what a state of affairs this is! You and Millbank are the victims of some foul conspiracy. He may be dead, while you are the lawfully-wedded wife of—of whom? a stranger and murderer! Oh, what a foolish, fatal mistake that Fairy Grotto affair was! But do not weep, Ethel; I shall devote my whole life, if necessary, to the solving of the mystery that hangs around it."

Ethel, in spite of the old preacher's assuring words, was overwhelmed with her grief, and it was some time before she could master her emotions and choke back her sobs.

Old Ptolemy Frodd was silent and thoughtful for a few moments, when he said:

"Ethel, I have kept your marriage a profound secret from all that called on me to-night, out of respect for your feelings, and we must continue to keep it a secret for the present. But I want to make one request of you, and that is that you let me see the ring that man gave you at the grotto."

"That I gladly give you," she said bitterly, tearing the circlet from her finger as though it were a hoop of fire, "I shall never wear it again—I never want to see it again!"

Frodd took the ring and examined it closely. An exclamation burst from his lips.

"Why, girl!" he said, "this is a diamond of the first water—a valuable jewel, such as none but a wealthy man could afford—well, unless obtained by robbery, and perhaps murder. I tell you, Ethel, mystery thickens around this night's work, and—ah, ha!—here—I have made another discovery! I see the initials 'E. D. R.' on the inside of this ring in very small letters. Would you believe it, I know something of the history of this ring, and that history is stained with blood!"

"What is it, Mr. Frodd?" the poor girl asked, the muscles of her face twitching with the agony of her young heart.

"Ethel," Frodd went on, glancing quickly around the room in a nervous way, betraying uneasiness, "you and I are already in a secret that must hold us together in the strictest confidence. They say a woman can't keep a secret, but I don't believe it. At least I am going to confide one to your keeping—one in connection with this ring."

"Your confidence will never be betrayed, Mr. Frodd, I assure you. In you I must now trust more than all others. Oh! that a shrewd detective was here to aid us!"

"Now then, Miss Ethel, you are coming right to the point, for, while I am a regularly-ordained minister of the church, and I feel that I am sincere, too, I am also what you wished for, a detective, but will not say a shrewd one, though I have had much praise."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Ethel.

"Yes; preacher-detectives are scarce—real preacher-detectives, I mean. If I were a fraud as a preacher—wearing the sacerdotal robes so as to cover my other calling, then your marriage would be illegal; but I am sorry it is not so, on your account; it is a sacred marriage. I have been a preacher for twenty years, and in all this time I have been a detective. My experience has all been in the west, south-west and north-west among the worst of characters, and I think I have been instrumental in bringing many hardened criminals to justice as well as reclaiming others from the ways that lead to destruction. There may be—in fact are, many cynical people who do not believe a man can be a Christian and at the same time be a detective. To catch a rogue they claim it takes a rogue. A reformed rascal may make a better detective than a preacher, but be that as it may, I feel that I have not been an entire failure."

"But, I am digressing; three years ago a great murder and robbery were committed in St. Louis. A man named Ramsey and his wife were murdered and their house robbed of many valuables, among which were a set of diamond jewelry valued at ten thousand dollars. At the time I was preaching at Lawrence, and a description of the number of pieces of jewelry and the initials upon some of them were sent me by a brother detective. Of course, I kept on a sharp look-out but without success. This ring, however, is one of the Ramsey jewels beyond a single doubt; still, the man that gave it to you may not be the man, or one of the party, that murdered the husband and wife."

"Oh, sir!" cried Ethel, "I am doubly sure now that the man I married is not Roger Millbank!"

"Well, I shall begin an investigation to-morrow that I hope may lead to the capture of my assassins and your unknown husband. But tell me, Ethel, did you have any other admirers besides Roger Millbank, that you know of? Did Ogilvie, the gambler, ever call on you?"

"He has called at our cabin frequently by uncle Robertson's invitation," she answered. "He never expressed any more interest in me than the warmest friendship. I had no admiration for him, although he is a very entertaining and intelligent man,—a perfect gentleman in his manners. Major Brandt, the Government surveyor, and Mr. John Radway, also, have called often at our house. I have nothing to say against any of them but that Mr. Ogilvie is a gambler."

"Well," said Frodd, consulting his watch, "it is getting late, and I would suggest that you return home, and be patient, vigilant and silent. Remember, I will stand between you and the man who may claim you as his wife, but this I don't believe he will ever dare attempt to do since he failed in killing me. Still, I believe there is some damnable plot being planned and consummated, but what it is we can only hope for the future to reveal."

Ptolemy Frodd saw Ethel safely home; then he returned to his room and retired for the remainder of the night. But, he was astir early the next morning, breakfasting with the family in the opposite room.

Ogilvie, the gambler, Rocky and Matt Hohn were the first to call on him that morning.

"Mr. Frodd," said Ogilvie, "we're here to offer our services to you. We've armed and equipped for anything. If, however, you haven't faith in us say so, and we'll not obtrude ourselves on you."

"No, I'll be da—doomed afore I'll 'renig' on you agin, Psalm-Singer!" added Rocky.

"My friends," said Frodd, who in daylight had made a satisfactory study of the three men's faces, "I am satisfied to put you down as helpers, and willing to trust you. Here comes Major Brandt, the surveyor, and Tom Ackerman, the 'cowboy.' I should like to have the major join us, for he is an old frontiersman, or rather, an experienced plainsman. Good-morning, major—good-morning, Tom!"

Major Brandt was a man upwards of forty years of age, though he looked much younger. He was tall and erect as an Indian, with a face indicative of great decision of character; with dark eyes and hair, and a full, dark beard. He had been stopping at River View, off and on, for some six months, and at the time he was waiting the arrival of a party from the south to assist him in the survey of the Black Hills dis-

trict. The major had also served his time as a soldier, with no little distinction, on the *Llanos* of the south-west, and with all his experience it was natural enough that Frodd should desire his services.

Tom Ackerman was a young man who had grown up on the prairie as a herder. He was a fine horseman, a deadly shot with rifle and revolver—a wild, dare-devil sort of a fellow who was a terror to all when in his "cups," but kind, generous and jolly when himself.

Brandt and Ackerman at once tendered their services to Ptolemy Frodd, and were accepted. Others came up and offered their assistance in hunting down the assassins, and the old preacher-detective kindly thanked them, but declined their offer for the reason that his party was sufficiently large.

Some were inclined to marvel at his accepting the service of such men as Ogilvie, Hohn and Rocky. His troubles with them at the Pine Cone had become generally known, and those who were not acquainted with the particulars of that affair, fixed suspicion on them as the attempted murderers.

Frodd revealed none of his secrets to his chosen friends, so that while he knew that something more than mere revenge prompted his attempted murder, they had no idea of the cause of the crime. Major Brandt had some prejudices against the three roughs, especially the gambler, Ogilvie. There was something about the latter, he said to Frodd, that he could not understand; however, the old man resolved to give Ogilvie a trial, and at once submitted to the five men his plans of action, but none of his secrets.

CHAPTER VII.

A BOY'S STRATAGEM.

To return to the cabin of Max La Fleur, the tanner.

We left the old Frenchman and his fair daughter Aimee confronted by four hideous savage foes, while on his sick couch lay Roger Millbank, and upon the floor, stricken down by the murderous shot of the savages, lay Shocky, the Boy Trapper.

The lad lay upon his side, his body doubled up till his knees touched his chin.

Old Max stood motionless facing the intruders, his body bent slightly forward, his fists clenched, his teeth set, and his black eyes glaring at the foe with the look of a desperate madman.

Little Aimee stood near her father's side, her hands clasped over her heart and her white face wearing an expression of terror.

A deep and deadly silence followed the entrance of the savages. The latter stood facing the father and daughter with the smiles of demons on their painted faces. They saw the pale-faces were transfixed with surprise and terror by their presence.

Max La Fleur was the first to break that momentary silence.

"Crafty," he said, addressing the handkerchiefed renegade whom he had often met before, "what does this mean?"

A smile that indicated a guilty conscience passed over the man's face as he replied:

"The Indians have dug up the hatchet."

"What if they have?" replied La Fleur. "Have I not always been the Indians' friend? Have I not dealt honestly with them? Have I not sheltered them under my roof and fed them from my table?"

"But the white tanner is the friend of our enemies," replied "Crafty," and then pointing first to the little knot of motionless humanity on the floor, and then at Roger Millbank, continued: "they are the Indians' foes, and the white tanner harbors them under his roof."

"They are my friends, too," responded Old Max, determinedly.

"They are our enemies, and we have been sent here to burn your cabin, and take you and your gal to the Indian village."

"Why did you slay that boy?" asked Max; "are you making war on boys and girls, too? Is this Indian manhood?"

"The pale-face boy carries the gun of a warrior," replied the dark-browed Crafty, "and his scalp will now hang at the girdle of the Sioux."

A cry burst from the lips of the terrified Aimee.

"Do not dare to mutilate that boy's body!" Max La Fleur fairly hissed between his set teeth.

"Do you threaten, Max La Fleur?" demanded the renegade.

"I am no coward! I shall defend my own!"

"Then you refuse to go quietly to the Indian village where the chief may grant you immunity?"

"Bah! talk of immunity from a treacherous savage! I am ready to die here," returned Old Max.

"Then you shall die, but your child shall be the wife of Crafty," responded the villain, fixing a devilish look upon the girl.

Aimee started and crept closer to her father's side. The old man laid his arm around her shrinking, trembling form and as he drew her closer to him he snatched a flashing knife from a sheath that hung on the wall and raising it above her head, cried fiercely:

"Devils, you shall not pollute my child's body even with your vile touch! Death will claim her before you shall!"

The Indians grasped their weapons, startled by the desperate look on the old tanner's face.

"Hold, Max La Fleur!" cried Crafty; "destroy that girl's life and you shall suffer a dozen deaths."

The old Frenchman gazing down into Aimee's eyes said something to her in his native language; then fixing his gaze upon the foe he exclaimed:

"Do not force me to slay my child or the wrath of an avenging God will smite you dead. Crafty, take your warriors and leave my roof! The death of that innocent boy already stains your soul!"

"The pale-face talks big; he will not kill his child; I am not afraid of him," was the renegade's reply.

"Scoundrel! leave my cabin!" cried the now thoroughly enraged tanner.

"Not without scalps," retorted Crafty, laying his hand on his tomahawk.

"Hold, there, you devils!" suddenly cried an impish voice in the room behind the savages; "hold! don't move or we'll shoot!"

Quick as a flash the Indians turned to confront the speaker, but scarcely had their eyes been removed from La Fleur when the form of Shocky, the Boy Trapper, became imbued with life and in an instant he was upon his feet uttering a yell like that of a young Comanche. At the same time a revolver in his hand rang out and Crafty fell forward dead.

Max La Fleur had not been slow to take in the situation, and releasing his child he sprung like a tiger at the nearest savage and drove his knife to the guard in the fellow's neck. With a rattling in the throat, a spasmodic clutching at the open air, the red-skin fell dead.

With terror the other two savages fled from the cabin into the night pursued by the intrepid Shocky; but they made good their escape and the boy returned to his friend, his boyish face flushed with triumph and excitement.

"God bless you, Shocky!" exclaimed Old Max; "you played that well, for we thought you dead."

"Well, I thought so, too, when they fired into me, but I guess I war only scared, for I feel all right. I laid curled up there on the floor just to make 'em think I war dead till the proper time come to put in my best licks. But, friends, I'm sorry of one thing—that I had to kill that feller. It is the first time I ever had to pull trigger on any man, be he Injin or white. I never liked the thought of takin' human life."

"My noble little hero," cried out Roger Millbank, "you did a glorious act when you killed that man, Crafty. The world is better off without such miserable, murderous wretches."

"But it'll be death for Mr. La Fleur and Aimee to remain here now," asserted the boy, "for them two escaped rascals'll bring friends down here to avenge their leader's death."

"Yes, yes; that is all very true," asserted Max La Fleur, "and as soon as Roger is able to be moved with safety, we will seek safer quarters somewhere."

"For Heaven's sake! do not let me stand between you and safety, Mr. La Fleur," advised the young ranger.

"We can all be saved, Millbank, so do not give yourself a moment's uneasiness," assured the old tanner.

By this time it was nearly morning. It was already growing red in the east. Sleep and rest were out of the question that night.

After the dead had been removed from the cabin and all things set aright, Aimee prepared breakfast for her friends.

After breakfast had been dispatched and the day had been fully ushered in, Max La Fleur made known his intentions of removing at once to the island in the river opposite his cabin. It was a place of refuge fixed upon long before in case of danger—such as now menaced them. He called it the Isle of Refuge. It was well calculated for a temporary defense. It was some forty rods in length by twenty in width. In the center stood a little cluster of tall, slender

trees fringed around with a dense growth of shrubbery. All the rest of the island was a barren waste of white sand sloping gradually from the center to the water's edge. On either side of the island the water was fully two hundred yards wide, deep and strong of current.

Shortly after sunrise the removal to the island was begun. A large bateau was used for the purpose. Roger Millbank and Aimee were taken over first. A comfortable tent was erected of poles, robes and blankets for the wounded ranger in the heart of the little *motte*. Then the household articles, provisions and in fact everything of value were transferred to the island, and although the old Frenchman and Shocky worked like beavers, it was high noon before the last boat loaded had been safely carried over to the Isle of Refuge.

After partaking of a hearty dinner the refugees examined into the condition of their firearms. Shocky had his trusty rifle and a pair of revolvers. Old Max was possessor of a Sharp's rifle, and some four muskets he had brought from Omaha to trade to the Indians, and a pair of Colt's revolvers. Besides they had the two rifles and the pistols that had belonged to Crafty and his friend. In all, they had eight rifles which were carefully cleaned up and loaded, and then they were ready to receive the foe.

Their boats had all been concealed—the bateau under some heavy drooping willows on the right bank of the river, while Aimee's little bark canoe was carried into the grove on the island, thus leaving nothing in sight that might attract the attention of the enemy to the island.

Keeping under cover of the little grove Shocky kept a close and constant watch upon all sides, and along in the afternoon he discovered a figure dodging among the trees on the bluff back of the old tanner's cabin. It was an Indian who seemed to be making a reconnaissance, ignorant of the fact that the house was deserted.

As evening approached other savages were seen gathering in the woods on the ridge, and darkness had scarcely fallen when there arose a fiendish yell on the night that fairly chilled the blood in the veins of the refugees. It was a yell of mingled rage and disappointment. It came from the deserted cabin, and was kept up for several moments.

Finally a dim light was seen shining from the cabin window, but rapidly it grew brighter and brighter. The cabin had been set on fire. Soon red tongues of flame darted out at the door and windows and ate through the roof. In half an hour the whole structure was in flames revealing in its light a wild and picturesque scene. Around the burning building stood a score of savages that to the eyes of the watchers on the island looked like fiends of giant form. Back of the fire rose the sloping hill with its dark, green woods frosted over with the shimmering light. At the foot of the hill the broad turbid river swept across the line of light like a great stream of molten silver. The little clump of trees that concealed the refugees rose up like a grim, black sentinel on the breast of the snow-white isle.

The savages stood around the burning cabin until the walls began to crumble, then they began searching the surrounding. They found the body of Crafty and his friend covered with some bushes a few rods above the cabin and at once set up a yell of dismay that resounded horribly through the night.

Their search, however, did not end with the finding of the bodies, but was continued, evidently for some trace of the whites.

Finally a warrior ran down to the river bank and searched the beach. A yell announced a discovery and his friends at once hastened to where he stood. The Indian pointed out the tracks of the fugitive in the sand, also the impression made by the prows of the boats. By these they knew the old tanner and his friends had embarked for a point unknown.

In silence they stand looking up and down the river and across at the Isle of Refuge. But they can see nothing, for the trail of the whites ends where it begins—at the water's brink. It never once occurs to their savage minds that Old Max is within rifle-shot of them.

Finally they return to the burning cabin where they appear to hold a consultation, then they take up their dead and move slowly and solemnly away up the river.

"Thank the Lord!" exclaimed Old Max, with an air of relief.

"They don't suspect we're so close," replied Shocky; "but now as we've nothin' to be afraid of, s'pose you and Aimee lay down and rest and let me keep guard."

Wearied and worn out with the labors and

excitements of the past twenty-four hours the father and daughter were glad enough to accept of the brave boy's suggestion.

Shocky paced with noiseless step the circuit of the little grove. The light of the burning cabin enabled him to see over the surrounding waters except where the grove threw a shadow across to the right shore. But this line of darkness was narrow and both eye and ear were kept on the alert when passing them.

Thus two hours or more had passed. The fire on the hill was gradually dying out, and the somber shadows were again settling over the river, when suddenly the boy discovered a long, dark craft creeping up the stream close along the right shore. He could see that it contained several occupants and that it was propelled by no less than three pairs of oars. But whether the occupants were Indians or whites he could not tell, but believed they were whites; and if so, they were undoubtedly friends. While debating with himself as to what he should do, a footstep sounded behind him and Old Max stood at his side.

"I can't sleep, Shocky," he said; "give me your gun and I'll keep guard while you sleep."

"Nary sleep, Mr. La Fleur," quickly responded the boy, "for, by the holy smidgeons! there goes a boat loaded with either friends or foes, and I'm bound to know which."

"I declare, there is!" exclaimed Old Max; "but how can you find out who they are without challenging them, and run the risk of publishing our whereabouts to enemies?"

"Why, I'll foller them in the bark," the lad responded, "and if they are friends bring 'em back here and save them runnin' into an Injin trap."

"That will be a dangerous undertaking, my boy, I am afraid. If anything should deprive us of your assistance, Shocky, I am afraid we would never be able to get away from here alive. And still, if those in the boat are friends, it is our duty to rescue them from the death-snare into which they are going unawares."

Being determined on following the bateau Shocky made ready to depart. Old Max helped him to carry the bark canoe to the water, when he at once embarked up the stream—the little boat gliding out into the darkness noiseless as a moving shadow.

The lad was an expert with the paddle, and despite the resistance of the great river's current, he sped along for half an hour, when he stopped to listen. But hearing nothing, he paddled on, and not until he had journeyed at least a mile did he stop again to listen. This time he caught the swash of oars. The boat was not very far ahead. Cautiously he moved on, and for the third time stopped to listen, but he could hear nothing. The boat had stopped, and its occupants were either lying in wait under the bank somewhere, or else had gone ashore.

Shocky waited a few minutes, then moved on, searching the lurking shadows for the mysterious craft, but all in vain. It had vanished as if swallowed up in the waves.

Finally the boy scout ran into a little cove, and landing, beached his boat. He then set off to search the bank, for he felt assured that the unknown boatmen had landed and perhaps gone into camp. He was creeping noiselessly through the dark woods when his ears were suddenly greeted by the chirruping of a cricket, and was immediately answered by the piping of a tree-frog. That both these sounds came from human lips the boy had not a doubt. Ears as carefully trained in the voices of night and of the wildwood as Shocky's could readily detect the deception.

But what did it mean? Had his approach been discovered and a trap set for him?

Having submitted these questions to his own mind, the boy stopped by a large tree-trunk to consider them and await further developments. While thus engaged he heard footsteps advancing. He pressed himself close against the tree, which he found was hollow and half-rotted away on one side. Into this hollow he had no trouble in squeezing his slender form; and scarcely had he done so when those approaching footsteps stopped near him, and he caught the dim outlines of a man's figure standing within arm's reach; yet it was so extremely dark that he could not tell whether it was the figure of an Indian or white man; consequently he remained perfectly quiet, scarcely daring to breathe through fear of detection.

The unknown soon proved to be the individual that had uttered the chirrup of a cricket, for, after taking his position under the tree, he repeated the sound, and was at once answered by a low, guttural ejaculation from the darkness

before him, and then another figure appeared and stopped in front of the first.

Shocky bit his lips to still the emotions rising in his breast, when he heard the first comer ask: "Who is it that answers the signal of the Night Hawks?"

"Black Bat," was the answer given by an Indian. "Who is here?"

"Night Hawk himself," was the reply of a white man. "Has not my messenger from the pale-face camp reached the camp of my friend, Crafty?"

"Yes, he came; but found Crafty dead."

"What?" cried the white man, "Crafty dead?"

"Yes; trapper-boy shoot him dead in old tanner's cabin."

The white man seemed deeply grieved by this news. After a moment's silence he asked:

"What trapper-boy killed him?"

"Shocky."

"Does he still live?"

"You bet!" said Shocky, to himself.

"Yes," replied the Indian, "and go away with old tanner—don't know where."

"Who is your leader—your chief now, Black Bat?"

"White Dragon. He is a pale-face like Crafty."

"I do not know him."

"He is a brave chief, and has slain many. He can be trusted by Night Hawk. He came from the far North since Night Hawk left our village."

"I must see him at once, Black Bat; there is work to be done yet to-night. Six men from River View are camped near here, and they must not be permitted to go from here alive. But where are you camped, Bat?"

"Over river."

"Then you go over at once, and tell White Dragon to come over and meet me in his boat at the mouth of Spider creek. Tell him I am a friend of Crafty's, and that Crafty had promised me the help I seek of him. I will watch the pale-faces that they do not escape, and be on the east side of Spider creek near its confluence in fifteen minutes. I will wait there till the chief comes. Tell him to be on the alert, for those pale-face foes are cunning fellows."

All this conversation was carried on in a low tone, yet Shocky heard every word distinctly.

Black Bat, the Indian, departed for his canoe, while Night Hawk, turning, walked away down the river.

Shocky stepped from the hollow tree, took in a breath of free air, scratched his frowsy pate reflectively, then, turning, made his way silently back to the river, determined upon a desperate adventure.

Entering his canoe, he paddled up-stream, and deliberately entered the mouth of Spider creek, and came to a stand where the shadows hung over him black and impenetrable. Here he remained waiting and listening.

Ten minutes passed, when he heard approaching footsteps pause on the bank of the creek near him. He uttered a low whistle. The fellow on shore answered it, then asked in a low voice:

"Is that White Dragon?"

"No," replied the desperate boy, altering his tone. "Dragon's sick and couldn't come. He sent me after you. He will meet you alone in the shadows of the other shore. You must come quick."

"Oh, the devil!" the other responded, and then stepping into the canoe and seating himself he said: "Pull out then, and be easy about it, or we'll get some cold lead through our carcasses."

The voice did not sound exactly, to Shocky, as it did when under the tree, but satisfied it was Night Hawk, he dipped his paddle, turned the canoe and moved down-stream.

By this time the moon was up, flooding the river with its mellow radiance, and as the little bark glided from the shadows of the creek into the river it passed a long canoe, or "dug-out," with two occupants, that had just turned from the river into the creek. Both boats, however, were moving so rapidly and silently that when Shocky glanced back over his shoulder the strange dug-out had passed out of sight among the shadows of the Spider. He was satisfied that it was Black Bat returning with White Dragon to meet Night Hawk, and the uneasiness of the boy can better be imagined than described.

With all his skill and strength he plied his paddle, and instead of going straight across to the opposite shore he turned down the stream.

The lad now had a pretty fair view of his passenger, who was sitting with his back to

their course and facing him. He saw that the fellow was a large, powerful man, but his face he could not see for the brim of his slouched hat shading it.

Shocky began to feel as though he had an elephant on his hands. He knew the man would not be easily scared by a boy like him, and yet it had been his purpose from the start to capture the arch-plotter as soon as an opportune moment offered.

Keeping his eye on the man, the boy plied his paddle in silence; but presently, when he saw the fellow before him growing restless, he dropped his paddle, and presenting a cocked revolver at his head, exclaimed:

"You're my prisoner, ole man! one word and you die! Throw up your hands!"

CHAPTER VIII.

DODGING THE FOE.

THE Boy Trapper did not have to repeat his command, for in an instant the surprised and startled man before him threw up his long arms, saying in a low tone:

"Youngster, be careful with that shooter, for I see there's a mistake somewhere. You're not the fellow that I supposed you were, and—"

"No, sir; I'm Shocky, the Boy Trapper, and I'll shoot quicker'n wink if—"

"Then there's a big mistake, Shocky, for my name is Frodd, Rev. Ptolemy Frodd."

"Tommy Frodd," repeated Shocky; "well, Tommy, you don't want to play any capers on me. That you're a first class *fraud* by name and game, I'm well satisfied. I heard your conspiracy 'ginst some whites camped against the river. I heard every word that passed 'tween you and Black Bat, and I made up my mind to snail you in. Tommy, you're in the wrong boat."

"And I say, Shocky, you've got the wrong man. I was hid near and heard the conference of Night Hawk and Black Bat, and made up my mind to try and be present at the conference on Spider creek when the chief came over. When you hailed me and told me that the chief was sick and would meet me on the other shore, I made up my mind in a twinkle to personate Night Hawk in an interview with the chief, and slipped in your boat. Boy, we've both fooled ourselves. That boat we met as we sailed out of the Spider was the boat I aimed to board, I know it is. Do you see the point?"

"Well, it looks that way, but I'm afraid you're lyin' to me a few like an ole—"

The boy's words were here cut short by the whistle of a bullet close to his ear, followed by the report of a gun; then out from the shadows of the shore in pursuit of them came that identical canoe that had passed them in the mouth of the creek.

This settled the matter in Shocky's mind: in the darkness he had taken aboard the wrong man, and Ptolemy Frodd, for he it was, had boarded the wrong boat; and now both found themselves hotly pursued by the foe they had expected to circumvent; in short, they were the worst deceived of the two.

"Here, Tommy Frodd," said Shocky, "you take this paddle and pull straight down the river and I'll fling some lead back toward them fellers. They're gittin' too close to make it healthy."

Old Ptolemy took the paddle and used it skillfully while Shocky opened a fire on the foe, but as he shot at random his bullets seemed to have little effect, for the dug-out continued the chase and a running fight was kept up for some time without any perceptible advantage on either side. But suddenly Shocky discovered a number of other canoes put out from the shadow of the left shore and join in the pursuit. Turning to Frodd he exclaimed:

"Pull, Tommy, for there comes a dozen more boats after us! By the holy smidgeons! Tommy, we're in for a lively whirl, you can bet!"

"My boy, hadn't we better pull for the shore?" asked the old man.

"We could, but I don't like to be run off the river by a pack of infernal Ingins, Tommy. I've some friends on an island below here opposite the ruins of Old Max's cabin—"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frodd, "then perhaps we can make the island, Shocky."

"We could, but, Tommy, I don't want to lead them red hellions there, for Mr. La Fleur and his little gal, Aimee, and Rog'r Millbank are there, and—"

"What! Roger Millbank there?—on an island near here?"

"Yes, in a bad fix from a poundin' he got. He war nighly dead when found, but's gettin' along now."

"Praise the Lord for this!" solemnly exclaimed the old preacher.

"But I tell you what, we musn't lead them Injins down there, for if we shouldn't be able to keep them off, Rog'r'd be a dead ranger. The Injins don't know they're there, you see."

"What shall we do, then, to escape those yelling demons?"

"We must double on our track and lead 'em back up the river. Try it among them islands, ahead, Tommy."

By this time it became evident that the savages were gaining upon them, and so every moment now was precious.

Before the fugitives lay a cluster of little islands covered with water-willows and cotton-wood shrubbery, and in among these they resolved to try and elude the red-skins. They kept on, however, until they had reached the lower side of the group out of sight of the foe, when they abruptly turned and pulled up among the islands.

The Indians came on and reaching the islands divided their force, sending three boats to the right, three to the left and one through the center of the group. Those sent around soon met at the lower end of the island, but the fugitives were nowhere to be seen; but the wily red-skins quickly detected the fox-like movement of the whites, and with a yell they tacked about and glided in among the islands.

Ptolemy Frodd and Shocky paddled here and there in a zig-zag course among the islands. In places they found the channel, or passage, between two islands so narrow, or shallow, as to admit with difficulty the passage of their canoe, and finally, when nearing the upper side of the group their boat grounded in the sand, where the water was scarcely three inches deep.

Ptolemy sprung out and pushed it through into deeper water, but just as it swung clear of the bar an Indian canoe with three occupants swung suddenly around into the channel, blocking their way.

With a wild, fiendish yell the red-skins leaped to their feet and grasped their weapons.

Old Ptolemy Frodd leaped into the water, and, swinging aloft the paddle in his hand, he dealt the nearest savage a crushing blow that sent that worthy overboard into the river. Then again and again, with lightning rapidity, the paddle circled through the air like the arm of a giant windmill, and with each sweep a savage went down in the water, where blow after blow was rained upon their heads until they were dead or unconscious.

But by this time the other boats were hurrying to the scene of conflict, and unable to escape in their boat the trapper-boy and his old friend leaped upon the nearest island and sought shelter among the bushes. But savage eyes had seen them, and soon half a dozen bloodthirsty wretches had landed and were thrashing through the shrubbery like hounds in search of them.

The fugitives ran to the lower side of the island and leaped the narrow channel onto the adjacent island. Crossing this one they waded the shallow passage to the next, and in this way they kept on until they had eluded the savages and reached the lower side of the group. Here they stopped and listened. They could hear the red-skins darting about like baffled wolves among the bushes.

"The sinful wretches!" said Frodd.

"Tommy," said Shocky, "I'm goin' to lead them Ingins 'round this way so's we can git back to our boat and shin out."

"How can you, Shocky, without imperiling your life?"

"Listen, now," responded the boy, turning around and inflating his lungs with air, which, when suddenly forced out, seemed to end in a sharp cry several rods away.

"Gracious, lad!" exclaimed Ptolemy, "you are a ventriloquist. That was superbly done! Throw a few more decoys over there, you magnificent little war-horse—"

"Here! here! this way, Tommy! run, man, run!" suddenly rose on the right from the eastern side of the group, and, as the savages went plashing through the water and crashing through the brush toward that point, Shocky stood shaking with suppressed laughter.

Suddenly there was a yell and then a crash of firearms, that was followed by groans of dying agony.

"Oh, heavens!" groaned Ptolemy Frodd with horror at the sound.

"Moley Hoses!" exclaimed Shocky with joy, "the red demons are firin' into each other in the darkness, and the way they sing out I'd say they were splatterin' each other's brains out, but let 'em splat. Now's our time to strike,

Mr. Frodd, so let's peg out for our canoe by keepin' to the left."

So saying, Shocky glided rapidly away, followed by Frodd with colossal strides, and in a few moments they were safely back to their boat around which stood a dozen Indian dug-outs.

"Gather up all their paddles, Tommy," said the boy, "while I pitch a few more words over a little to the south."

In a few moments every paddle had been transferred to Shocky's canoe, and then leaping into the craft each took up a paddle and sent the boat flying from among the islands into the river, and before their escape was discovered they were fully a hundred yards from the island.

A wild, demoniac yell followed the discovery of their escape, but when the outwitted red-skins found their paddles had all been stolen they seemed transformed into frantic demons.

And a parting shot from Shocky's gun added fuel to the flame of their wrath, for all they could now do was to stand and watch the cunning pale-faces paddling off in safety into the gloom of the distance.

"Shocky," said Old Ptolemy when he realized they were out of immediate danger, "you are a little—a little staver."

Shocky laughed at the old man's odd compliment, then replied:

"And the way you paddled them three redskins, Tommy, I should say you war a bu'ster from the roarin' Wabash. But just hear 'em Bob Crusoes yelling down there! Don't they open their yawps and let her scream? Tommy, look here; if you ever catch me gittin' you into another deefikilty like this, I hope you'll kick me up-hill and cuss me down."

"I never swear, Shocky; I am a preacher."

"Great je-whomicky smidgeons!" exclaimed the astonished boy, "you a preacher? Who ever heard o' a preacher on a war-path and kickin' 'round like a wild bull in the mountains, spankin' the brains outen red-skins instead o' teachin' them peace and love and the way the Holy Prophets went? Old folks, ar'n't you tryin' to feed this rooster on sawdust?"

Ptolemy Frodd, for the first time in a week, burst into a peal of hearty laughter at the boy's blunt, outspoken words.

"It's true, Shocky," he replied, "however wrong it may appear for a minister to be an Indian-fighter."

"Oh, I don't think it's wrong," exclaimed the philosophical youth, "and if it's religion that puts starch in your backbone, strengthens your arm and dashes the sand into your craw when it comes to business, it'd be a good thing if lots more folks in this world had some o' the same material. I never was an awful bad boy, if I do say so myself, and never until yesterday had I fired a shot at any human bein'—not even an Injin; but I found it necessary to shoot the daylights right outen a renegade, whose soul is now smokin' hot in—"

"Boat ahoy!"

The challenge came from the shadows along the shore. Shocky dropped his paddle and took up his rifle.

But Ptolemy Frodd recognized the voice and answered:

"Ho, friend Rocky, is that you?"

"Bet it is, Psalm-Singer," was the response, and the next moment a bateau with five occupants ran alongside of them in the moonlight.

CHAPTER IX.

A DASH FOR THE ISLE OF REFUGE.

SHOCKY knew that the bateau alongside of them was the one that had passed the island and that he had followed.

"Wal," declared Rocky as he grasped the old preacher's hand, "we thought you'd throwed up your hand, Ptolemy, when we heard that shootin' and them red devils yellin'; but what ye there, Frodd, a captive?"

"No, sir; I've a brave little friend—Shocky, the Boy Trapper."

An exclamation burst from the lips of those in the bateau.

"Good-evening, Shocky," said Tom Acker-

man, "don't you know me, my boy?"

"I should say I did, Tom," replied the boy, "and I'm all-killish glad to meet some feller I know, though I'll be dashed to smidgeons if this big preacher isn't a lively crowd to be out with, you may shoot me for a tadpole."

"You may bet he's a hull meetin'-house full, and alers holds a full hand," observed Rocky.

"What became of them Indians you were in trouble with?" asked Ogilvie, the gambler.

"We Bob Crusoe them down on the islands b'low here by stealin' their paddles and runnin'

away with 'em," answered Shocky; "but they'll git off some way'r other, if they have to swim. Thar's haydoogins o' them, and we've got to look out or our hair'll ornament some warrior's belt."

"Well, what shall we do, Ptolemy?" asked Major Brandt.

"We can only go ashore and go into camp again," replied Frodd.

"As for me," said Shocky, "I'm gein' back to the Isle of Refuge or the folks there will stand on their heads. Tom, you know Rog'r Millbank? well, he's down the river with old Max and his gal on an island."

An exclamation of surprise burst from the lips of the men.

"He 'bout got his head bu'sted, though," the lad continued, "but he's pullin' along spankin'ly now, and I guess'll git well if the Ingins don't git hold of him; but if they do his scalp isn't worth takin', his head was all cut and mauled up so."

"I am truly glad to hear that he is recovering," declared Brandt.

"Yes, for if he had been killed Miss Robertson would have died of a broken heart," said Ogilvie, though just why he had made this assertion Ptolemy Frodd could not fully understand, for to him it seemed out of place.

After some further conversation the two boats were headed toward the shore, and as they moved along Shocky said to his friend:

"Mr. Frodd, I wish you'd go with me to the island."

"D'you think I'd be welcome, Shocky?"

"Welcome!" exclaimed the lad, "I'll bet you a dollar you'll be doubly welcome. The fact is, we're in need of friends down there."

"Then I believe I will go with you," replied Frodd, and when they reached the shore he said to his friends: "Boys, I'm going with Shocky to the island; I want to see Millbank. I may stay there to-night, but if I do, I'll join you early in the morning. If it didn't look so much like intruding we'd all go down. But keep your ears and eyes open, boys, for there's dangers around you. Good-night."

So saying the boy and the old preacher-detective turned their boat and moved slowly and silently down the stream in the shadow of the bank.

As they passed opposite the group of islands—the scene of their late adventures—they heard the "Crusoe" Indians still there.

Half an hour's paddling brought them in sight of the Isle of Refuge, and when they finally left the shadows of the shore and veered off toward it, they were suddenly hailed by the voice of Max La Fleur, demanding:

"Who comes there?"

"Me—Shocky," was the trapper-boy's reply as he and the preacher reached the island and landed, "and I've got the bossest kind of a friend with me, too—a reg'ler ole slam-banger on a fight."

La Fleur advanced to meet them and was introduced to Frodd.

"Welcome, my dear sir," said the Frenchman, joyfully. "We are in sore need of brave friends just now. This is my daughter, Aimee, Mr. Frodd."

The maiden extended her little hand and greeted the old man with a sweet, tremulous voice.

"Shocky," said Old Max, turning to the boy, "I never expected to see you alive again."

"We had a big racket with the redskins, you can bet, but we outginnered 'em and escaped handsomely," responded Shocky; "but come, now, Mr. Frodd, and I'll introduce you to Rog'r Millbank."

The tent in which Roger lay was lighted with a candle, though the walls were darkened so that the light could not shine through.

At sight of Ptolemy Frodd young Millbank started up with a cry of surprise and joy, for he and the preacher had met before at River View.

Shocky at once retired from the tent and sought La Fleur to consult on their situation. While thus engaged, Aimee took her position as sentinel, and silently paced the rounds of the camp.

Frodd and Roger held a long conversation. The old preacher revealed to the ranger the mysteries surrounding the wedding at Fairy Grotto. Roger was deeply affected by the startling news, and at once expressed the belief that it was a deep-laid conspiracy, but what result was to be achieved by it he could not imagine.

"Surely," the old detective finally said, in a low tone, "the attack of La Fleur on you had nothing to do with the conspiracy."

"While it looks suspicious, Mr. Frodd, I am

sure it was accidental. He had been in the power of some Indians that night but was released by some trick of that brave little Shocky, and was on his way home, when in the darkness he took me for an Indian and beat me down with a club. But a few hours before I had been in the clutches of some white, masked villains who waylaid me. They put a rope around my neck and told me I must hang unless I revealed one thing to them. I never asked them what it was, for I resolved to die rather than make terms with outlaws. But before they could execute their threat, that glorious Shocky came to the rescue and ran the villains off. I am sorry now I didn't find out what it was they wanted to know."

"Of those at River View, Roger, whom do you suspicion?" Frodd asked; "what do you think of Ogilvie, the gambler; Brandt, the surveyor; Ackerman, the cowboy?"

"Ogilvie is a shrewd, sharp fellow—rather peculiar for a gambler, too, for I know of one or two instances where he gave his evening earnings at the card-table to a poor family in the town. He always was a warm friend of mine, professedly. I don't believe he is the villain, do you?"

"He made a remark to-night that sounded queer, I thought."

"Well, he may be the rascal, Humbolt, but I would never mistrust him—I would as soon mistrust Major Brandt and Ackerman, and we all know they're above reproach."

Frodd narrated the interview he had heard between Night Hawk and Black Bat, and the mistake he and Shocky had made in attempting to ferret it out. He expressed the belief that Night Hawk was one of his party, but which one he could not tell, for Night Hawk's voice was disguised in his talk with Black Bat. He declared his intention of investigating the matter when he returned to his friends by finding out who was absent from camp at the time he was. But Roger would not hear to his leaving the island that night, and after earnest entreaties from all parties he finally consented to remain till morning on condition that all retire and allow him to stand guard.

As this was agreed to, the old man took his position and paced the weary hours away.

Ere the rosy streaks of morning dawn burst into flame, all were astir. Aimee prepared a sumptuous breakfast which all partook of with a hearty relish.

Just as the sun came up La Fleur took Frodd ashore and the old detective hastened up the river to join his friends and conduct them down to the hospitality of the Isle of Refuge.

Shocky was on guard when the sun came up and as the shadows lurking along the shores were dispelled by Old Sol's arrows of light, the lad's keen eye caught sight of the end of a canoe prouding slightly through a fringe of willows drooping in the water on the left bank. It was not there the day before, so of course, the natural conclusion was that it had been taken there during the night, and by Indians, too. But why had Ptolemy Frodd not detected it? It was undoubtedly one of the very same canoes or dug-outs, that he and the preacher had robbed of their paddles.

Shocky called La Fleur's attention to the boat. Its presence was discussed with no little misgiving, although no sign of life was visible about it.

"We must keep a sharp watch upon it, Shocky," said Old Max, "there may be savages in the boat now waiting for an opportunity to strike, and if this should be true, it might be that there are a dozen more loaded dug-outs concealed under those willows."

"I'll keep an extra eye on that quarter," said Shocky, and he started on around the grove.

When he reached the opposite side he saw Ptolemy Frodd and his companions coming down the river bank. La Fleur had told Frodd where his bateau was concealed and in this the party was to cross to the island. To Shocky's surprise, however, they were all running, and the old preacher, who was in the advance of his friends, was swinging his hat and pointing obliquely across the river in an excited manner. What could it mean?

Shocky ran across the little grove and looked out over the water, and to his utmost horror beheld a dozen savages running from the woods and dodging into the fringe of willows where the canoe had been discovered.

"Injins! Injins! they're coming, La Fleur!" cried the youth excitedly, and running back across the motte he shouted at the top of his lungs to Frodd and his men.

Meanwhile, Old Max, with rifle in hand, followed by brave little Aimee with two other

loaded guns, advanced to the edge of the grove ready for the inevitable conflict.

And just as the red-skins—a score strong—glided out from among the willows toward the island, Old Ptolemy and his friends put out from the opposite shore.

It was an exciting moment in the lives of those on the island, for their only hope lay in Frodd and his friends reaching the grove first. Little Aimee ran to the south side of the grove and in mute appeal stretched out her hand toward them while she lifted her white face imploringly toward Heaven.

The sight was one that would have touched the stoniest heart, and, with renewed strength and determination, the men in the bateau plied the oars.

CHAPTER X.

A BLOODY CONFLICT.

NEVER did men work as did Frodd and Rocky, who handled the oars of the boat. The distance from the island to either shore was about the same, and for a time it seemed a question of doubt as to which party would land first.

In silence Shocky and La Fleur waited for the approach of the foe, and when the foremost boats were half-way across, the Boy Trapper's rifle rung out and a savage dropped his paddle, clutched wildly at his breast, and then fell over dead, his body hanging half out of the canoe.

And the next moment Old Max's musket rung out like the boom of a cannon, and a handful of buckshot went hurtling among the canoes, for a moment seeming to confuse the savages.

Without waiting to see the result of his shot, the old tanner took up another gun and fired again, simultaneous with Shocky.

Two of the dug-outs swung round and drifted at the will of the current, their occupants dead or wounded; but, undeterred by this disaster, the others paddled on and finally reached the island in the face of a deadly fire.

As they leaped ashore the bloodthirsty savages uttered a wild, fiendish yell that blanched the cheeks of the fugitives, but their war-whoop was followed by a yell of defiance from the throats of Ptolemy Frodd and his followers.

Shot after shot did Old Max pour into the savage horde, while with woman's quick, deft fingers Aimee reloaded his guns.

Evidently the savages had expected to take the fugitives by surprise, and would have succeeded, in a measure, but for Ptolemy Frodd and party, so silent and quick had been their movements. As it was, however, one third of their force was killed and disabled before they had struck a blow, and, when the struggle at length came, they found themselves face to face with Ptolemy Frodd's men.

The foes met on the open island, and with fierce yells and shouts closed in deadly, sanguinary struggle. Pistols cracked in rapid succession, tomahawks whirled through the air, knives thrown by savage hands flashed in the morning sunlight. Yells, shouts, curses, groans and rending blows made the young day hideous.

Old Max, with a yell like the roar of an enraged lion, and little Shocky sprung into the thickest of the fray and dealt deadly and sturdy blows right and left.

Half defeated before the struggle began, the savages soon began to yield. Gradually they were forced back toward the river, and, finally, with a yell of dismay, they broke and fled in confusion—some plunging into the river and trying to escape by swimming and diving, others throwing themselves into their dug-outs, and, lying flat on their backs, tried to paddle the craft. But few, however, of the over-confident red-skins escaped unharmed to tell the story of their bloody defeat. Three wounded, besides several dead warriors, and four canoes, were left in the hands of the victors.

After all, however, the victory had been purchased at no little loss. Matt Hohn lay dead; Tom Ackerman was seriously if not mortally wounded; Ptolemy Frodd had received another scalp wound from a bullet; Ogilvie had been seriously wounded in the arm by a flying tomahawk; Shocky had been knocked senseless, though he soon recovered; and Rocky, whose left eye was just beginning to see light again, received a downward blow above the right eye that tore loose a patch of skin that fell down like a curtain over that optic giving a horrible and ghastly appearance. Old Max and Major Brandt were the only ones that escaped without a wound.

Young Ackerman was carried to the tent where Roger Millbank lay and his wounds dressed by Old Max, whose knowledge of surgery was of no mean character.

The wounds of Ogilvie and Rocky were dressed by Frodd and Brandt.

The wounded Indians were placed in a canoe and sent adrift that their own friends might rescue them and attend to their needs.

The body of Matt Hohn was carried into the grove and prepared for burial. All were sad and sorrowful enough over his death, but Rocky's grief was almost inconsolable. Matt had been his best friend—his "right bower"—for long years and it was hard to part with him. When it came to laying his body away in the grave, Rocky went to Ptolemy Frodd and said:

"Mr. Frodd, you're a Gospel man and I want you to say something nice over poor Matt when we lay him in the grave. It's all we can do for him, poor feller. You know he wer'n't the meanest man living—that he had a good, kind heart even if he war a leetle rough. You know he didn't fear the very old devil and died in the harness."

"Rocky, I will conduct a brief service at your friend's burial," replied the preacher, seriously; "but say, Rocky, there is one thing about his death that troubles."

"Why, Mr. Frodd, didn't he die like a man with his face to the foe? Did you see Matt Hohn 'renig' when trumps led?"

"Matt fell with his face to the foe, Rocky, foremost in the fight; but he received his death-wound from a shot in the back!"

"What do ye say? Matt Hohn shot in the back? Then no foe done it, 'Psalm-Singer.' It must 'a' been an accident."

"It might 've been, Rocky, yet it was a singular accident to happen in so small a crowd. But say nothing about it, for it will only serve to wound the feelings of our friends."

So Hohn's body was consigned to the grave.

The dead Indians were also buried, and all traces of the late conflict removed. Not all either, for Tom Ackerman was suffering great pain, while the rest of the party, with the exceptions of Brandt and La Fleur, gave the Isle of Refuge the appearance of a hospital.

Ptolemy Frodd, Rocky and the Boy Trapper were, however, soon ready for active service. But what could they do toward relieving the situation of its increasing dangers? Indians could be seen off on the wooded bluffs, and among them at least three white men were discovered. That the latter were the moving spirits in the siege upon the island old Ptolemy had not a doubt, and this belief was partially confirmed, when, as the day advanced, one of the outlaws was seen approaching the river-bank bearing a white flag.

Ptolemy Frodd stepped out of the grove, laid down his rifle in recognition of the truce-flag and then walked down to the water's edge and waved his hand to the renegade.

The latter at once climbed down the bank, disappeared in some willows, but soon emerged therefrom in a canoe and came straight over toward the island, his flag floating from the prow of the boat.

When half-way across he turned his boat upstream, and came to a stand, using his paddle only to counteract the force of the current.

"Say," he called out, "will you meet me here?"

"For what purpose?" inquired Frodd.

"I want to hold a conference with you looking to peace and the stopping of bloodshed."

"Well, we're no ways anxious 'bout it," was Frodd's rejoinder, "however, I will meet you."

"But, say, are you the leader over there?" demanded the truce-bearer, as if doubting Ptolemy's authority.

"Whatever I agree to, the boys will," answered the old preacher, seating himself in an Indian dug-out and paddling out into the stream.

Meanwhile Shocky lay in the bushes with a bead drawn on the outlaw to "wing" him in case he intended treachery.

As Ptolemy approached the man he saw the fellow run his hand over his face, and his fingers through his hair as if "brushing up his countenance" so as to appear to good advantage; but, as the old preacher-detective ran alongside of him, he mistrusted that he was endeavoring to produce the very opposite, for his hair was dragged down over his forehead and his face streaked with dirt from dirty fingers. Despite his efforts, however, to disguise himself, the keen eye of Ptolemy Frodd recognized him at a glance as one of the men who claimed to have been a witness to the Fairy Grotto wedding—one of his attempted assassins!

But for the fact that he claimed to be a man of honor, and was bound to respect the flag of truce, Frodd would have shot the man dead with

the pistol that now seemed burning in his pocket. But controlling his inward emotions with masterly skill, and feigning entire ignorance of the man's identity, he said:

"Well, stranger, I'm now at your service."

"I presume your folks are heartily sick and tired of this unholy, bloody work?" he said, with a furtive look.

"I can't say that we are," replied Frodd, determined not to show too much anxiety for terms of peace; "our fellows over there are made of the material that never gets tired and sick when it comes to fighting red-skins and—outlaws. The way we walloped the red-skins this morning makes us feel as though we were masters of that island, at least."

"But you cannot withstand a long siege," said the outlaw.

"We're fixed nicely for a few weeks, any how; however you can state your terms, and if deemed reasonable, we will consider them."

"You have one man in your party that we want, and his deliverance into our hands will insure the rest of you your safety."

"And who's that?" asked Frodd.

The truce-bearer, as if afraid to speak aloud, leaned forward and spoke the name in a loud whisper.

"Well, well," said Frodd, as a thought flashed through his brain, "we think a great deal of that man, sir, and I think we would all rather die together than surrender one of our most gallant friends."

A smile passed over the face of the outlaw—a treacherous, sinister smile.

"Well, you know now," he said, "what I'm here for."

"Why do you want him, and no other?" questioned Frodd. "Why wouldn't I do as well?"

"Because he is wanted," was the emphatic response; "he made a false report to Government authorities as to the conduct and attitude of the Indians in Dakota, and that report was the means of bringing a lot of soldiers into the territory to hamper the freedom of the Indian, and open warfare has been the outcome of it. He lied, and nothing but his life will atone for the lives his act has cost the Sioux."

"If that's the case let the Indians seek redress of the Government, and if it finds they have been wronged, the guilty party will be speedily punished. That's the proper way to settle that difficulty. The life of my friend will not stop the war but simply feed the Indian thirst for more blood. Moreover, I don't know that he's guilty of the charges preferred, and even if I did, I would not be the coward to give him up to save my bacon. No, sir, tell your folks we'll all die together."

"Very well; you'll have the chance, for a messenger has been dispatched for a hundred warriors. Think well of what you have said."

"All right; come on with your warriors," said Old Ptolemy defiantly, "you'll get the best we've got. We'll die game, sir."

Thus the conference ended, and each of the men returned to his friends.

"What did the fellow have to offer?" asked La Fleur of Ptolemy.

"He demanded the surrender of one of our friends," replied Frodd, "and assured me of no further molestation in case we complied. He says the party wanted is responsible for the bringing on of this Indian outbreak by false reports made to the Government."

"And which of our friends is it?" questioned the Frenchman.

"The one most likely to know the most about the Indians," was the old man's evasive reply.

"Ah!" exclaimed Old Max, with a shake of the head, "then we all know that the one wanted is Roger Millbank, but I will lay down my life in defense of the life I came so near taking."

"I did not say it was Roger, Mr. La Fleur—I will not say who it is, for I know there is not a man here but who is brave and chivalrous enough to give up his life, if needs be, to save his friend's and I am determined no such sacrifice shall be made; and that's why I withhold the name. If any has to die, let us all die together."

"Second the motion, Mr. Frodd!" exclaimed the indomitable little Shocky, "we're no chicken-hearts to be skeered into a unconstitutional surrender. We can hold this island till the Missouri runs dry, or we starve. This is big talk for a tad like me, but I mean it all the same, by smidgeons!"

"Bully for you, Shocky!" shouted Rocky, "I'll go my pile on you bein' the gamest young rooster that ever scratched Missouri sand."

Aimee, assisted by her father, prepared din-

ner for all, and after the meal was over a general consultation was held in the tent where Roger Millbank and Tom Ackerman were confined.

During the afternoon not an Indian or outlaw was to be seen on either shore, and as night approached Frodd expressed the belief that the foe had entirely withdrawn, and that the truce-bearer's story of having sent for help was all a hoax. In this opinion Major Brandt and Ogilvie concurred, but the only definite way to settle the question beyond doubt was to send scouts ashore, and as soon as darkness set in, Major Brandt volunteered to reconnoiter the right shore and Ptolemy the left, and at once departed on their dangerous mission.

CHAPTER XI. A SILENT STRUGGLE.

WHAT that night would bring forth no one knew. If the savages were still about, it was not unlikely that they would endeavor to accomplish, under the friendly cover of darkness, what they failed to accomplish in open day, and it was through hopes of frustrating their designs that Ptolemy Frodd and Brandt had gone ashore.

The old preacher-detective landed some distance below the ruins of La Fleur's cabin and cautiously made his way back from the river. He reconnoitered the woods along the hillside where the foe had been seen during the day, but not the sign of a red-skin could he find. Still he was not fully satisfied, and concluded to go down the river aways and make assurance doubly sure.

Passing below the Isle of Refuge, he finally found himself on a narrow ridge running toward the river, and which terminated on its bank with what was known as the Sentinel. This was simply a shaft of limestone rock some ten feet high by four or five in diameter at the base. It stood there solitary and alone, and had the appearance of having been placed there by the hand of man. The sides of the ridge on which the Sentinel stood broke into perpendicular embankments some thirty feet down the slope, and from within three feet of the base of the rock the end of the ridge pitched abruptly off into the river. So that one approaching the Sentinel must leave it by the way he came in if he would leave it safely. It was not a desirable place to be caught, but ignorant of the dangers of the place, Ptolemy Frodd moved on and approached the Sentinel.

There was no timber or shrubbery within several rods of the stone, and the sky being clear and the stars shining brightly, he could see the surrounding ridge and its pitfalls quite clearly.

Stopping, he leaned against the Sentinel and looked up and down the river and then listened. He heard a sound like the brush of a wing; then he saw a dark, elongated object appear before his eyes, which he at first took for a narrow, black cloud drifting against the sky, but which soon resolved itself into the tube of a revolver clutched in a man's hand; and then he realized with startling force that that hand and revolver were being followed around the Sentinel by some one intent upon murder. Of course the natural conclusion was that it was an outlaw, for an Indian, under the circumstances, would not have used a revolver—even had he possessed one—when a tomahawk would have been a surer and more silent weapon.

The revolver was in plain sight and still advancing, though the owner's body was concealed behind the rock, and drawing his own pistol Frodd began to retreat backward around the Sentinel just fast enough to keep the revolver and hand that held it in view. He was tempted once to put a ball through the unknown's hand, but concluded it would be better to wait and put it through his head, and so he moved on. In this manner the two circled around the shaft two or three times, when suddenly there was a flash and a sharp report, and a bullet cut close to that head of old Ptolemy's which already bore two pistol-wounds.

Involuntarily Frodd leaped backward from the stunning crack of the weapon. At the same time his own revolver was accidentally discharged, but with what effect he did not know for he never heard a word from the unknown. In fact, not a word had been uttered by either of them yet.

Pressing himself close against the rock Ptolemy kept a sharp look-out on both sides for the unknown who he felt satisfied was still on hand. Nor did he have to wait long before the black muzzle of that weapon appeared in sight again trying to steal a march upon him; and then again the advance and retreat began—silent as though both were voiceless.

How long it was to last thus, and how it was to end, Frodd had not the faintest conception, but he finally made up his mind that it must end some way or other, and turning quickly, he dashed around the Sentinel hoping to find the rear of the foe unguarded. But he was somewhat mistaken, for the fellow seemed actuated by the same motive at the same instant, and the result was that the two came together with such violent force as to cause them to recoil half stunned. Their pistols were discharged at random or by accident, and in the confusion of the moment they ran together again, and again actuated by the same impulse, each dropped his revolver and clutched at the right hand of the other to prevent him shooting; but finding themselves disarmed they grappled in a hand-to-hand struggle. In strength they seemed well matched. They still fought in silence.

Suddenly they fell. Over and over the earth they rolled—this way and that—until finally they spun over the bank and went rolling in an avalanche of dirt and clay down the steep declivity into the sweeping turbid river. Nor was their hold on each other broke in the descent, but it became all the firmer when they plunged into the flood—they clung to each other with the desperation of drowning men, for the fight was now with the waves—not with each other.

At this point the river swept in toward the shore with a strong current and in this the two combatants were rolled and whirled down the stream.

Half drowned they were finally landed in water where they could touch bottom; but no sooner did they realize that they were, for the time being, free of danger from the waves than they began to pummel each other furiously. And the science that old Ptolemy had displayed at the Pine Cone in chastising Rocky and Hohn, was again called into requisition. A few, well-aimed blows convinced his antagonist that he was no match for the brawny preacher, and as there could be no other means of escape, he was forced to beg for mercy.

"Enough!" he cried, his mouth half full of blood and water. "Good God, Ptolemy Frodd, don't you see I'm a friend?"

"Great King Solomon!" burst from Frodd's lips, "it's Major Brandt or I'm a blind Bartimeus! In the name of goodness, man, why didn't you speak out sooner? I might 'a' killed you!"

"I did speak the moment I recognized you," said the major, as he stood in the water to his arm-pits, panting with exhaustion and pain; "I was certain you was an Indian with that handkerchief around your head."

"And so did I take you for a red-skin, not dreaming of you being on this side of the river," replied Frodd.

"I came over here because—"

"Ha! ha! ha! quite a ludicrous mistake, folkses!" suddenly broke in upon the ears of the two men, and the next moment a canoe with a single occupant ran out from the shadows of the bank alongside of them.

"Rocky, as I am born!" exclaimed Ptolemy Frodd.

"Bet your pile it is, boys," replied that individual, as he assisted the two half-drowned men into his boat.

"How in the world came you here, Rocky?" asked Frodd.

"Wal, arter you fellers left the islan', Roger Millbank and that boy, Shocky, had a confab; both come to the 'clusion that the best thing to be done was to send to River View for help, and Shocky determined to go at once. Wal, I brought him ashore, landin' him a hundred yards below here 'bout ten minutes ago. That's what brought me here."

"Well, I'm glad you're here, Rocky, for my eyes are about in the same condition that yours have been lately—somewhat bunged—and you'll oblige me by hurrying this craft to the island, where I can procure some ointments," said Major Brandt, humorously.

Rocky indulged in an outburst of laughter, then headed the canoe up-stream.

In a few minutes they had reached the island, and having made known their plight, Max La Fleur furnished Frodd and Brandt with dry clothing.

The silent conflict of the two friends, and its ludicrous termination, formed the topic of a rather laughable conversation in the tent of the wounded.

Assured that they were menaced by no immediate danger, all laid down to sleep except Rocky and La Fleur, who stood guard.

Frodd, Brandt and Ogilvie slept on blankets in the open air, or rather Brandt and Ogilvie did, for Frodd did not close an eye that night,

although he lay silent and apparently asleep. His mind was too deeply occupied with strange thoughts to sleep. The moonbeams struggling through the open foliage of the trees enabled him to see the forms of Brandt and Ogilvie lying near. By their respirations he judged they were asleep, but in this he found he was mistaken, for suddenly one of them rose to a sitting posture and gazed carefully around him, then rose to his feet and crept noiselessly away through the bushes—was gone a few moments, then returned and lying down, drew his blanket and once more became motionless.

Owing to the darkness, Ptolemy Frodd was unable to tell whether the man was Brandt or Ogilvie; but he was satisfied of one thing—that all was not right—that the fellow's silent movements looked very suspicious. But he had no time to make an investigation of the matter, for the hour for changing the guard had come, and he was one of the parties that went on duty.

The night passed away and day dawned bright and clear.

The first man astir was young Ogilvie. He expressed himself as feeling quite well after his night's sleep, despite his injured arm. He visited the wounded in the tent and inquired after their health; then alone he sauntered leisurely out upon the island, and when he reached the lower side, he sat down near Matt Hohn's grave with his back to the grove. Here he sat, apparently in a reflective mood. Presently he stretched himself out in a reclining attitude with his elbow resting on the ground and his head on his hand. While in this position he dug a little hole in the sand and dropping something in it covered it up. Then he arose, paced to and fro a few minutes in a sort of a reverie. He looked up and down the river. He caught sight of a bird skimming along the surface of the water toward him. He drew his revolver and fired at it, then turned and walked briskly back to camp whistling as he went.

But his movements had not passed unobserved. The eagle eyes of Ptolemy Frodd had marked every one of them with a vague suspicion.

Breakfast was finally announced and all sat down to the repast.

All missed the happy, boyish face of Shocky from their midst, but none felt the loss of his presence more than pretty Aimee. With the first streaks of dawn she began casting eager looks down the river for the return of her boy-lover.

After breakfast the wounded men's injuries were dressed by La Fleur and Frodd, and then the cares, fears and speculations of another day began.

Not the sign of a foe red or white—was to be seen along either shore.

Ptolemy Frodd was restless and uneasy. No one failed to notice this but all accredited it to his apprehension of impending dangers.

Finally the old detective walked down across the island in a sort of mental abstraction. With his eyes on the ground he walked on around to Matt Hohn's grave. Here he paced to and fro across the spot where Ogilvie had reclined a short time before. A little spot of damp sand marked the spot where, as the old man believed, the gambler had buried something and in going backward and forward he managed, by a dexterous scrape of the foot to remove a little sand from the spot every time he passed.

Finally his sly work was rewarded by unearthing a folded paper. He stooped and picked it up at the same time taking up a large pebble. The former he thrust in his bosom, the latter he tossed out into the river.

Still he continued his pacing, but finally sauntered leisurely away toward the camp.

He found Ogilvie engaged in conversation with Aimee. Brandt was on guard and Rocky was molding bullets for La Fleur.

Entering the tent where Tom Ackerman and Roger were in conversation, the old detective took that paper from his bosom and opened it.

Although a man of the most remarkable self-control, his face assumed a look of sudden surprise and his eyes were cast with a quick furtive glance around him. The exclamation that involuntarily rose to his lips was stifled in a forced cough.

The paper he held in his hand was the certificate of Humbolt's and Ethel Robertson's marriage at the Fairy Grotto!

CHAPTER XII.

FRODD AND OGILVIE HAVE A TALK.

NEITHER Roger Millbank nor Tom Ackerman noticed the expression upon the face of Ptolemy

Frodd, as the old man folded up the paper and returned it to his bosom.

Addressing some pleasant remarks to the wounded men, the old detective rose and left the tent. His fingers burned to grasp the throat of the gambler Ogilvie, for there was no doubt left in his mind now as to who the double-dyed villain, Rufus Humbolt was. The discovery, however, caused him a pang of deepest regret, for he had formed a good impression of the handsome Frank Ogilvie, gambler though he were. But what was he to do? He was almost disarmed by this sudden surprise, for his suspicions had been fixed upon another; but Ogilvie must be arrested, and since Rocky had been a boon companion of the young gambler, it was not unlikely that he would take sides with his friend, and thereby complicate the dangers they were already surrounded with.

While revolving the matter in his mind, Ogilvie came up to him, and taking him by the arm, said:

"Frodd, let us take a walk."

Although in no mood to trifle with him, Frodd walked along with him to the lower end of the island. Seating himself on the sand, the gambler said:

"Be seated, Mr. Frodd."

Ptolemy sat down.

"Now, Mr. Frodd," the gambler said, "I want to talk with you; for a preacher, you have always placed confidence in me—at least I have thought so, and I assure you I have respected that confidence, and now want to make a confidant of you."

"Well, I never betrayed a friend," said Frodd.

"To tell you the truth," Ogilvie went on. "I am a gambler for policy only—my real calling being that of a detective."

"What? Ogilvie, the gambler, a detective?" exclaimed the astounded Ptolemy Frodd.

"Yes, sir."

Frodd turned to the man, made a motion or two with his hand, then extended that member to the gambler, who, on taking it, exclaimed:

"By Judas! is it possible that you too are a detective, Frodd?"

"Have I not proven myself such by the signs and grip of our association?" responded the preacher.

"Yes, but how is it that we haven't discovered this before now?"

"Because you are a gambler and I am a preacher."

Ogilvie burst into a laugh.

"Well," he said, "I have something to show you," and he began digging in the sand.

"It's not there," said Frodd, with a smile: "I had my eyes on your movements and got the paper."

"Ptolemy Frodd! you're a bold, slick old eel; but what about that paper, my dear sir?"

"Does it not explain itself?"

"And why haven't you hinted this to me before?"

"Because some suspected you of being the villain, Humbolt."

"Well I'll be eternally blest!" exclaimed Ogilvie. "Frodd, I have been working along the Missouri five years and never got into such a mixed up affair. Some three months ago I came to River View hunting for the murderers of the Ramseys, of St. Louis."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Old Ptolemy taking from his pocket the ring that Humbolt had given Ethel, and handing it to Ogilvie; "do you recognize that, my gay gam-bo-lier?"

"It's one of the Ramsey jewels!" declared Ogilvie in astonishment; "why, sir, I never mistrusted you of being the guilty party!"

The two men indulged in a hearty good laugh.

Ptolemy Frodd gave a full history of the wedding at the Grotto, the attempted assassination of himself by Humbolt, and the history of the ring so far as he knew it.

"Then," said Ogilvie, "the man who attempted to kill you—the man who gave Ethel this ring is the man to whom you gave this certificate?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then our friend, Major Brandt is Rufus Humbolt!"

"Judas Iscariot!" burst from the old detective's lips.

"Yes, sir," Ogilvie went on, "last night while you and Brandt slept, I went through his pockets. I found it in an inner pocket of the coat he had hung up to dry after you and him had had your dip in the river. Didn't you notice the paper had been wet? I've had my eye on that gentleman for months and have been watching for some clew as to who he

really was, and when I saw him hang up his coat I could not resist the temptation to inspect the pockets; and I must say the result has been a good one. I came along with you on purpose to watch the surveyor, and now I think he's the man we both want."

"Very likely," replied Frodd; "I know he is the man that that truce-bearer demanded yesterday; and, by the way, that truce-bearer was one of the witnesses to the Fairy Grotto marriage. Things now are developing fast. Brandt is undoubtedly in league with the Indians and may be responsible for our present dangers. I am satisfied now that he is Night Hawk, whom Shocky and I overheard in conversation with the Indian, Black Bat; and if he is all this, he is the man who killed Matt Hohn in the fight, for Matt was shot in the back. And furthermore, having failed in killing me the night I gave him this paper, he crossed the river last night to finish his work. That affair at the Sentinel was, on his part, a premeditated murder, and if he is permitted to run at large much longer he will hurt somebody, for he strikes at the back."

"Yes, we want to put an end to his movements pretty quick now, for if he misses that paper, he may get uneasy and give us the slip. He can only be staying with us to put you out of the way when the opportunity is afforded. But what can be at the bottom of all his work?—his conspiracy against Roger Millbank and you, and his desire to be the unknown husband of Ethel Robertson?"

"I think he is some scoundrel that knows of Ethel's being heiress to a fortune somewhere, and he's trying to get it into his possession. With this certificate of marriage and the evidence of his two confederates he could easily establish the fact that he was the husband of Ethel, and thereby gain control of her property. This of course, is only my opinion of the matter. It may be still worse when the truth is known."

"Well, we must put him under arrest at once," said Ogilvie, "and we've got to go about it carefully, for if Brandt is Humbolt he's a daring, desperate man, and might put a chunk of lead through one or both of us."

So saying, the two rose and walked back to the little grove. Brandt was not there, but in looking around the detectives saw him walking along the beach at the upper end of the island. His footsteps were quick and short—indicative of uneasiness of mind. Was he beginning to mistrust something? Had he missed the certificate from his pocket?

But there was no time for mental speculation, and so Ptolemy Frodd, followed by Ogilvie, sauntered along leisurely toward him.

Brandt did not notice their approach until Frodd's shadow fell across his path, so deep was he absorbed in thought. Just as he looked up the old detective laid his hand upon his shoulder, and, looking him straight in the eye, said:

"Major Brandt, you are—"

But here his words were cut short by Ogilvie, who suddenly cried out:

"My God! FRODD, LOOK UP THE RIVER!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A DREADFUL MOMENT.

PTOLEMY FRODD turned his head and glanced up the river. A cry burst from his lips. To his surprise and terror he beheld no less than a score of logs and dug-outs floating down toward the island, and over the top of each he could see the muzzles of from six to ten rifles, while ever and anon the tufted head of a savage was seen to pop up. The dug-outs were partially filled with brush and sand, and both they and the logs were floating sideways down the stream.

"Merciful Heaven!" cried the old detective, "there are a hundred or more Indians behind those boats and logs!"

"We're in deadly peril, Frodd!" said Ogilvie; "I must warn our friends," and he ran back toward the grove.

A grim smile overspread the face of Brandt as he glanced up the river and then at the excited, terrified face of Ptolemy Frodd.

The advancing foe was over two hundred yards away, and moving slowly with the current. It would require several minutes for them to reach the island, for their breastworks were floating at the current's will. They could burry them but little.

Frodd did not arrest Brandt, but, turning, he hurried to camp. Death inevitable was staring all in the face unless they could escape from the lower end of the island in the boats before the foe landed.

Men were at once sent to take the boats around to that point. The wounded were being

dressed for removal. Major Brandt was assisting in the preparation for departure, though his attentions were devoted more particularly to Aimee. Everybody was in a fever of excitement.

Suddenly Rocky, who was attending to the boats, was fired upon from the shore and forced to seek shelter in the grove.

A dozen Indians appeared upon either shore, and their presence there told the whites that it would be sure death to enter the boats.

"Well, we can die fighting," said Ptolemy Frodd with calm resolution, "but oh! that poor little girl! it is her fate more than all others that makes my heart shudder."

"Mr. Frodd," said Aimee with all the resolute spirit of a little heroine, "I can die fighting, too, and *will* before I will be taken a captive!"

"Ah, my little heroine!" said Ptolemy, "you do not know what is coming—our fight to-day will not be like that of yesterday. It will be—Great heavens!"

This exclamation was occasioned by a hoarse, prolonged noise, like the whistling of a steam-boat, that suddenly came ringing and crashing in frightful intonations through the valley and echoing in demoniac shrieks among the wooded hills.

For a moment all were transfixed by the sound, and stood gazing from one to the other in speechless wonder. Rocky was the first to speak:

"A boat! a government boat!" he yelled.

Then a glad shout burst from every lip, and the wildest excitement of hope and joy prevailed.

All hastened to the lower side of the little grove and looked down the river.

Through the timber on the lowland across a bend in the river they beheld the moving smoke-stacks of a boat from which were pouring and trailing out behind on the air, great volumes of black smoke.

"Will it be in time?" some one asked in eager tones.

"Let us trust in God," said Ptolemy Frodd.

The greatest excitement prevailed among the Indians on the shore for full well they knew what it meant; but there was no evident excitement among those drifting in the river above.

Every eye on the island followed the bursting smoke, and in a few moments the great boat came gliding around the bend into full view, its prow plowing the turbid waters with wonderful rapidity. A flag was flying from stem and stern. The deck was covered with blue-coated men—soldiers. Under the forward flag they saw a person standing swinging his hat excitedly, and as the boat came nearer all recognized it as Shocky, the Boy Trapper.

"A Government boat with soldiers, with Shocky in the lead!" cried Ogilvie.

"Can they be aware of our impending peril?" asked La Fleur.

Before any one could answer the roar of a score of rifles resounded on the air. The boat had been fired into by the savages on shore and in an instant all was commotion on deck. A broadside from the soldiers sent the lurking red-skins flying back into the woods and the throbbing boat steamed on.

Ptolemy Frodd dashed from the grove and running to the lower side of the island, shouted aloud to those on the boat. But already the eagle eyes of the brave pilot had discovered the logs in the river above. The soldiers had been warned, and every ounce of steam was now employed in impelling the boat forward. In a few moments the little monster went panting and puffing astern the island as if eager to dash in among the savages intruding within its element.

Cheer after cheer burst from the lips of the rescued islanders as the craft steamed by.

Soldiers with rifles in hand stood ready for the bloody work, while a cannon on the forward deck was being trained upon the nearest of the floating savage breastworks.

Then came a moment of eager suspense to those on the island. With distended eyes and throbbing hearts they watched the men at the cannon.

"Look out now," suddenly cried Old Ptolemy.

Scarcely had he spoken when there was a great puff and a boom that shook the very hills and valleys. The river before the boat seemed to burst into a thousand frothy jets and boiling foam where the load of grape from the great gun struck. The roar of the cannon was followed by the discharge of a hundred rifles, and to this was added the shouts of the soldiers; and

finally, to make the din more complete, the boat's whistle was thrown open when the most infernal noise that ever startled the echoes of the Missouri valley was heard then and there.

The savages were within four rods of the island, and straining every nerve to reach it, when the cannon pealed out. Some of them fairly leaped upward in the water with sudden terror at the thunderous roar of the gun, and like a school of fish they darted away in every direction in the river. Some endeavored to escape by diving, some made for the island and were shot by the soldiers, a few still clung to their floating breastworks and opened fire on the boat; but resistance was fruitless and in a minute's time every savage was swimming for his life. Their rout was complete, scarcely a savage that reached the shore with his life having even so much as a knife about him.

The boat stopped, and, swinging in toward the shore, tied up.

The commander of the troops, accompanied by Shocky, came over to the island in a boat.

The moment Ptolemy Frodd and Ogilvie realized that they were out of danger of Indian massacre they advanced to where Major Brandt stood, when Frodd said:

"Major, consider yourself under arrest for the attempted assassination of myself, and the criminal deception and marriage of Miss Robertson."

Brandt started back, and his face grew black and white by turns. His eyes seemed to change their color, and his nostrils quivered. His breath came quick and hard, and in a husky tone he asked:

"Ptolemy Frodd, what do you mean?"

"What I say, Mr. Humboldt," replied old Ptolemy triumphantly; "you see I have run you to your hole, notwithstanding you have played your game well. I have the marriage certificate that you got for your wife in my possession."

"Sir, you did not find it on my person!" exclaimed the terrified man.

"No, I did not, but brother Ogilvie here did."

"Yes, found it in your wet coat pocket last night," put in Ogilvie.

"Curses, on you!" hissed the baffled villain, and then, like a tiger, he leaped from Frodd's grasp and struck Ogilvie a blow in the face that felled him to the earth, and with the cry of a panther he leaped over his prostrate form and bounded away toward a boat at the lower end of the island.

"Halt!" yelled old Ptolemy, but the villain heeded him not.

"Ping!" rung the old detective's revolver, and the fugitive staggered and fell to his knees—struggled to his feet, and again ran on.

"Ping!" rung the revolver again, and Major Brandt stopped, glanced back over his shoulder and fell upon the beach.

The two detectives advanced to where he lay breathing hard.

"You've 'creased' him, Frodd," observed Ogilvie.

"I'm sorry, major," said Frodd, seriously, "but you provoked the shots."

Brandt looked up into Frodd's face. His eyes no longer burned with that defiant look. His face was pallid with fear and terror.

"You're a better shot than I am, Frodd," the prostrate man said; "this would never have happened had I made sure of your death on the night of the wedding in the grotto."

"Ah! then you admit that you are Rufus Humboldt?" exclaimed the old detective.

"You would not have shot me had you not been certain of my wrongs against you, nor would I admit anything were I not dying from the effects of your bullets."

At this juncture Ogilvie left to see how matters were going on between the soldiers and savages.

In a few minutes he returned and reported the savages' defeat.

"Curse the luck," said Brandt, bitterly. "I deserve this fate for being so stupid. I might have escaped unharmed once."

"Why did you take any risks?" asked Frodd.

"That I might slay you and Millbank, and assist a friend in abducting Aimee La Fleur—he who met you with a flag of truce yesterday is that friend."

"Yes, yes; he assisted you the night of the wedding," said Frodd. "I recognized the fellow, and knew his demand for your surrender was all a trick of some kind. But, Brandt, why did you marry Ethel Robertson as you did?"

The man was silent a moment, and then said:

"Well, as life with me is short, I might as

well tell you all, for I have nothing to fear in this world. I married Ethel because she is an heiress, though she nor her uncle knows it. With the certificate obtained from you I expected to prove that I was her husband and get hold of her fortune before the executor found out how matters stood. With you out of the way I felt more certain of my success, for I did not like the way you criticised our secret marriage, and was afraid you would expose me, especially after you discovered the groom was not Roger Millbank. The arrangements for their marriage at Fairy Grotto was made one evening on the river shore, whither a spy of mine had followed Roger and Ethel and heard every word. All my plans to possess her fortune were matured after I had heard of the lovers' romantic arrangements. To make it successful Roger Millbank must be put out of the way, and three of my men were posted along his route to intercept him. This they did, but the boy Shocky rescued him, and, but for the fact that he fell into the clutches of the old Frenchman, who beat him unconscious under the impression he was a savage, Roger would have been in River View the night of the wedding. It was a bold and risky game to play, but I failed only when I did not make sure of your death. I knew I stood well with the people of River View, and after I had shot you, I sent my friends off in hot haste, while I returned to my quarters. The trail of the two horsemen that led us off up here was that of Anson and Macon. I came along with you to see that you were put out of the way when an opportunity was offered—"

"That's why you laid for me at the Sentinel last night," interrupted Ptolemy Frodd.

"I expected to have finished my work there."

"And have you not been in league with the savages?"

"For several years—ever since I was an assistant Government surveyor in northern Nebraska."

"And you were known as Night Hawk?"

"I was."

"And tried to betray us all into the power of White Dragon's band of savages the night we camped above here?"

"I did, and but for that boy, Shocky, would have succeeded."

"Major, how long have you been on the prairies of Dakota?"

"Three years."

"Have you not been the leader of a gang of outlaws?"

"I have," he answered, feebly.

"Were you ever in St. Louis?"

"Yes—why?" and Brandt started uneasily.

"Why, the diamond ring you gave Ethel was one—"

"Of the Ramsey jewels!" exclaimed the dying man, excitedly.

"Then you killed the Ramseys?"

"I helped to do that crime."

"Major, during the fight yesterday morning with the Indians did you not shoot Matt Hohn in the back?"

"That shot was intended for you—it was a mistake."

Here followed a momentary silence. Ptolemy Frodd became absorbed in serious reflection. Finally he said to the dying man:

"Brandt, your soul is stained with crime; do you have any hopes of the future life?"

Brandt made no reply. Frodd repeated the question, and still no reply.

Major Robert Brandt, alias Rufus Humboldt, was dead. He had died without a gasp or a sound to indicate the moment of dissolution.

"What a wicked life and a painless death," said the old detective, as he closed the dead man's eyes.

Ogilvie returned to the camp and narrated the story of Brandt's life and death.

By this time most of the soldiers had come over to the island, and now followed a season of great rejoicing.

No one was happier than Ptolemy Frodd. He realized now that Ethel was free of the blunder made at the Fairy Grotto, and that the arch-villain of the Missouri Valley had gone to his final rest.

Not another Indian was to be found in the vicinity of the Isle of Refuge, and the next day Ptolemy Frodd and his friends, accompanied by La Fleur and his daughter and Roger Millbank, started in boats for River View, where they finally arrived in safety, and in time for the Rev. Ptolemy to keep his appointment and preach his first sermon in the old barracks, with Shocky as one of his most attentive listeners.

Shocky went with the soldiers up the river in the capacity of a guide and scout. He drifted on and on up the Missouri until he finally found

himself in Wonder Land—the Yellowstone valley. It was three years before he returned to River View to meet his little sweetheart, Aimee La Fleur. In this time he had grown to be a large and handsome young man. His voice had undergone a complete change, also—had changed from that of its boyish tones to that of manhood; and in speaking of it he piteously remarked: "The worst thing about it is, when I lost my 'goslin voice' I also lost my ventriloquial powers entirely, and I can't surround a crowd of Ingins or outlaws like I used to do and make 'em b'lieve I was a hull regimenter."

Max La Fleur took up his residence at River View and engaged in the tanning business and fur trade, and accumulated quite a little fortune in the course of years.

Rev. Ptolemy Frodd had the pleasure of marrying Ethel Robertson a second time, and this time there was no mistake about Roger Millbank being the bridegroom.

Ogilvie, the gambler-detective, undertook to trace out the source from whence Ethel's fortune, of which Brandt had spoken, was coming, and after a year's working he found the fortune in England; but to his disappointment he found, also that the heiress was another Ethel Robertson, and not the Ethel of River View. But the latter felt no disappointment, for she declared that she was an heiress in the possession of Roger Millbank's love.

The influence that Ptolemy Frodd exerted over the discordant elements of River View society seemed miraculous, for in a short time the place was one of the most orderly and law-abiding on the Missouri.

THE END.

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